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# Examination of the role of the teacher in early reading

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**REFERENCE ONLY**

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER  
IN EARLY READING**

**by**

**ROSALIND FISHER**

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

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Rolle School of Education  
Faculty of Arts and Education

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **An Examination of the Role of the Teacher In Early Reading**

**Rosalind Fisher**

The research presented here considers the role of the teacher of reading in the child's first year of school. It was undertaken in an attempt to find out more about how teachers go about teaching children to read. The research was inductive in design and adopted an ethnographic methodology. The research was undertaken in two parts with five teachers in all providing case studies of practice.

In the first part the roles adopted by three Reception / Year One teachers were examined and the literacy tasks they provided for children were analysed. The results of this study led the researcher to question a) the focus of the classroom observation on predetermined aspects of practice and, b) the omission of the teachers themselves from discussion of their practice during the duration of the research.

The second part analyses the largely spontaneous, literacy related responses made by two further Reception / Year One teachers to the children in their classes and the comments these teachers made about their thoughts and actions in interviews after the teaching sessions. The findings include an analysis of the layers of concern that appeared to influence teachers in their interactions with children about literacy. Examination of these interactions also suggested ways in which teachers may adopt procedures that go some way towards compensating for the differences between home and school learning that have been identified by other researchers.

These findings led to the development of a model of practice which shows teachers to be acting in both reactive and proactive ways. This view of practice led the researcher to question models of initial and inservice training for teachers of reading which are based on proactive models.



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The study was financed by Rolle School of Education.

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

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Literacy Text and Context UKRA Conference attended, Exeter 1992

What Counts as Reading ? Conference, Lancaster 1992

Literacy for Life UKRA Conference attended, Cambridge 1993

Teacher Decisions in Early Reading Paper presented at International Reading Conference, Lancaster 1993

Signed ..... *Ros Ash* .....  
Date ..... *9-2-95* .....

## INTRODUCTION

This research has been carried out over three years with the intention of finding out more about the role of the teacher in early reading. It arose as the result of many years' interest in reading while working as an infant teacher and then lecturer in education. Throughout this time debate has continued about the best ways to teach children to read. However, debate has tended to focus on method and text rather than the *teacher*. The research described here attempts to analyse in depth the actions of a small number of teachers in relation to the teaching of reading in the child's first year of school.

The research was undertaken in two parts. The first part examines the roles adopted by three teachers and the literacy tasks they provided for the children in their classes. The second part analyses the largely spontaneous, literacy related responses made by two teachers to the children in their classes and the comments these teachers made about their thoughts and actions after the teaching sessions. Both parts of the research contribute to the conclusions drawn and to my discussion of the implications of this research for the teaching of reading.

However, the dissertation is not only a report of a piece of research. It also represents the development of my own understanding and ideas about research into reading and teaching. As such it does not exemplify perfect research design. My own control over research methodology has developed over the four years. Whilst I am pleased with much of the second part of the study, the first part gives rise to many questions about research into teaching. It is included here because the results do add to the overall conclusions. Also my reflections about the methodology of the first

part contribute significantly to the design of the second part of the study and to my understanding of research design in general.

This factor has made the writing up of the study more difficult than it might perhaps have been. My developing understanding has meant that parts written early on during the research no longer represent my thoughts at the time of writing the complete dissertation. However, the decisions I made early on in the study need to be explained and discussed because of their impact on the design of the second part and on the conclusions I have drawn. In some ways the finished dissertation needs to be read as an account of a journey; a journey of developing understanding of research design and methodology. It must, though, also be read as the account of a piece of research that has its own validity as a contribution to our understanding of the teaching of reading. To assist the reader through these aspects of the dissertation I have tried to make clear the chronology of the research study as well as provide a coherent account of this piece of research.

In the first chapter I have explained why I undertook this research and what I was trying to find out. I have also examined the assumptions that I brought with me to the study and how these may have affected the design and analysis of the research. The second chapter became the hardest to write. Much of it relates to the decisions that were made and the thinking that informed the first part of the study. The ways of looking at children's learning and at classrooms played an important part in the development of my interest in what the teacher does when teaching reading. However, as my understanding developed and I felt more confident in the way I wanted to undertake my research, I began to question the appropriateness of the

## Introduction

earlier studies to my work. I have tried to describe my thinking at that point in the study and also to consider how this changed.

Chapter Three chronicles my developing understanding of research methodology and examines my reasons for adopting the methods used. Again the reader will be able to discern a shift in approach between the first and second studies. I have discussed the reasons for this and justified the design of the second part of the study in the light of findings from the first part. Chapter Four looks at the detailed analysis of both parts of the study. I explain how I went about the analysis and what factors led to the conclusions I discuss in Chapter Five. Here I analyse the findings and discuss them in relation to previous research into children learning and views about the teaching of early reading. I also consider the validity and potential for generalisation from the small sample studied. In Chapter Six I summarise the whole study and consider the implications for the profession.



## CHAPTER ONE

### FIRST PREMISES AND INTENTIONS

#### Introduction

This research has arisen from a long held interest in the teaching of reading. At the start of my teaching career in the seventies psycholinguistic research challenged the previously held (though opposing) views about 'phonic' versus 'whole word' methods and emphasised the role played by expectation and context on the performance of the reader (e.g. Goodman, 1968). At the same time there was a good deal written about the influence of the types of text used on how children learned to read. In an earlier study (Fisher 1980), I compared the language employed by some commonly used reading schemes with the language children used in their writing. The findings of this study were similar to those of, for example, Strickland (1962) and Ruddell (1965) in the United States and highlighted the differences between children's language and that used in reading schemes.

It is not, however, my intention to revisit the ideas that interested me at that time but to consider the impact that the research itself had on me, the teacher. I surfaced from six years of part time research at master's level with a master's degree in education but questioning what I had learned that was of help to me as a teacher of reading. Two main strands of thought emerged. The first related to the impact of my research on me, the class teacher. Although I now understood more about the reading materials I used, I did not feel I had learned any more about the *teaching* of reading. I felt that the children's learning was actually more affected by their interaction with text *within* the context and by how the individual teacher *used* the materials. Secondly, I felt a great dissatisfaction with much of the reading I had undertaken as

part of the research. Research seemed to me to talk about text and children as isolated entities and, whilst I understood the reasons for so-called scientific research, I felt that the reduction of variables and the clinical nature of the research rendered many of the findings inapplicable to the classroom context in which I was working. I was left with a feeling of dissatisfaction at the limited impact of research on my own classroom practice.

I think that there is no doubt that, as a teacher, I was not alone in these feelings. A consideration of the innovations that have had most impact on the teaching of literacy in the eighties emphasises this. Initiatives which seem to me to have most affected practice in the teaching of early literacy in the last decade could be said to be the 'Apprenticeship Approach' to reading (Waterland 1985) and the National Writing Project (1985-9). Neither of these arose directly from empirical research. The former is based largely (but not exclusively) on the eloquence of the text (Smith, 1971 and Meek, 1982) and a description of classroom practice (Waterland, 1985). The latter arises almost entirely from dissemination of classroom practice. This is not to say that they are not supported by theories of learning derived from research (e.g. Waterland's discussion of Goodman, 1982) but that their impact does not come directly from those theories.

This has led me, ten years later, to shift my emphasis in both the subject and methodology of my research. For the present research I wished to focus on the teacher, as distinct from the child and the text, and to adopt a more qualitative approach. This was in an attempt to understand and to describe practice in a systematic way but also in a way that could perhaps illuminate and explain practice for the benefit of teachers themselves and those in training. This has not been

unproblematic. The process of the study itself has been a journey in understanding, not only about teaching reading but also about approaches to qualitative research.

In this chapter it is my intention first, to explain the context of the research by considering my beliefs both about teaching reading and about research into reading. It is important to clarify these beliefs and the assumptions they bring with them because of the way in which they will have affected the work I have done. Although I have briefly indicated the source of these beliefs, it is not my intention here to examine these in depth but to clarify my own value position. The second chapter focuses on previous research studies that have had a direct impact on this research. In the second half of the chapter I shall turn to the focus and aims of the research.

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions I brought with me to this work are fourfold and were central to the focus and design of the research. These are assumptions concerning:

- i) how young children learn and particularly about how they learn to read;
- ii) the importance of the context in which the learning takes place;
- iii) the importance of the teacher in how and what children learn;
- iv) what I mean by the term 'reading' and, consequently, what it is that I am looking at in the classroom.

### **Children learning**

I see social interaction as central to learning and the role of the adult as crucial to this. I also see children as active participants in the learning process, in which they actively endeavour to make sense of the contexts in which they find themselves. These views explain my interest in the role of the teacher in the process of learning

to read. They also led to an approach to research which sought to include and examine the aspects of the context rather than to try to limit its effect.

I cannot, here, examine the huge body of research into children's learning, but I wish to consider briefly three key sources that have been particularly influential in shaping my views: the work of Bruner, Vygotsky, and Donaldson's discussion of research into Piagetian theory (Donaldson 1978).

Two of Vygotsky's (1962 and 1978) main propositions concern the centrality of language and the importance of shared social behaviour. His fundamental premise is that development takes place within social and cultural settings. The implications of this for teaching are great. If speech in childhood lays the foundations for a lifetime of thinking, talk in the classroom is essential. If shared social behaviour is seen as the source of learning there are further implications for the teacher's role. The idea of shared social behaviour being crucial at the beginning stage of learning throws responsibility on those who interact with the growing child. It is the interaction that takes place between adult and learner in the context of learning that is central to that learning.

Bruner is one of the most notable contemporary exponents of the view that language develops in children through processes of social interaction. In Bruner's (1983) theory of the development of knowledge the human being is regarded as an active creator and learner. Bruner regards language as a tool and considers how the child learns through interaction with adults to use the tool effectively and efficiently. He holds that children learn language for a purpose and is concerned to explain how infants come to give their utterances meaning and use their linguistic resources to



refer to things. He believes that for learning to take place appropriate social interactional frameworks must be provided - he called these 'scaffolding' (Bruner 1977). In early language development the parent, usually the mother, provides the framework which allows the child to learn. To do this she provides contexts and routines that are familiar to the child. She remains finely tuned to the capabilities of her child and lets him/her proceed at an appropriate pace. By 1983, Bruner saw the active role of the child as vital in this interaction.

Donaldson (1978) presented a picture of children who are active and efficient learners. Following up the work of Piaget (1926, 1952, 1958, 1977 and Piaget and Inhelder 1956), she considered the effect of the child's *interpretation* of the researcher's intent. She discussed how children are actively making sense of the situations in which they find themselves and also that, where children can put the problem presented within their own frame of reference, they can do much more than would be expected from their Piagetian stage of development. Here again there are direct implications for the teacher of young children.

Both Bruner and Vygotsky are concerned with the relationship between language and thought, how children learn language and how language assists learning. Much discussion (Donaldson 1989, Beard 1993) has ensued about whether assumptions can be made about how children learn to read and write from theories of how they learn to speak. Without making any such assumptions, which are open to dispute given the disparate nature of the two processes, certain conclusions can be drawn from the theories presented above about young children's learning that have implications for the teacher and for research into teaching:

- i) children are actively concerned with making sense of their worlds and talk underpins this active reconstruction;
- ii) learning is a shared activity which should not be undertaken in isolation;
- iii) children will learn more in co-operation with adults or peers than might be thought possible from their Piagetian stage of development;
- iv) the child learns in close association with a caring adult.

These ideas underpin my own views about children's learning and were central in the design of the present research. This view of children's learning places importance on the social and linguistic context in which the learning takes place and on the adults who interact with the child.

### The importance of the social and linguistic context in the study of learning

The notion of children as active learners constantly striving to make sense of the world in which they find themselves renders the effect of the context on the learning of great importance. This context in the case of the infant classroom can consist of a number of factors that may influence the child's learning. These can be related to learning in all areas of the curriculum or particularly to literacy learning.

Garton and Pratt (1989) consider the individual differences in children's experience of language on starting school. The language used by the teacher may or may not be similar to the language to which the child is accustomed. The expectations of the teacher, or rather the expectations that the child interprets the teacher as having, may influence the way the child behaves. Heath (1983) described how different literacy practices in the home did not always match with teachers' expectations on

starting school and the tasks the children were set were sometimes at odds with previous experience. With reference to children learning to read, their understanding of the relevance of reading as it is undertaken in the classroom could affect their motivation to learn and their perception of how difficult or easy a task this is (e.g. Reid 1966). Clay (1979) discussed a range of other factors to do with the way the child is feeling about peers, home and other situations which could also have an impact on what happens in the classroom.

My conviction that the social and linguistic context of learning has an impact on how children learn has had a fundamental effect on the focus and methodology of this research. It has caused me here to reject research methodology that attempts to reduce the variables within the context by a laboratory type study. It seemed to me that an in-depth examination of aspects of the context must take place in as natural a setting as possible if it were to provide data that could yield interpretations of that context.

This conviction was also the factor that has made me want to focus my attention on *the teacher* of reading rather than on the child learning to read. There is already a wealth of information from research about how children learn aspects of reading and also how the child interacts with the text. (For an overview of this see, for example, Adams 1990) However, so often, the mediator of this learning (the teacher) is not taken sufficiently into account.

### The importance of the teacher

It follows from the comments I have already made about the way children learn and about the importance of context that I believe the teacher has a crucial part to play in

the child's learning. However, debate about the teaching of reading has tended to focus on method or programme used. I shall use the terms 'method', 'programme' and 'approach' frequently in the study, so it is important that I clarify what I mean by these terms in this context. The term 'method' when related to the teaching of reading has been widely used in the literature. For example, Goodacre (1971) identified six methods such as 'phonics' or 'Look and Say' etc. (p. 25). Today these seem to describe a theoretical stance rather than the actual classroom practice. As evidence from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) shows, teachers mostly do not employ only one method in the teaching of reading but mainly select from a variety of methods (DES 1989). By 'programme' I mean a published scheme that may be adopted by a school, as, for example, the Ginn 360 scheme or the Longman's Book Project. I have used the term 'approach' to describe ways in which individual teachers operate which may incorporate aspects from more than one 'method' and/or 'programme'. It was aspects of commonalty among these approaches that I hoped to analyse through this research.

This research also comes at a time when early years' teachers are having to reconsider their role in the light of tension between traditional views of the infant teacher as facilitator and the demands of a prescribed National Curriculum. The dilemma facing the teacher in the early years stems, to some extent, from opposing traditions of early years education. Bruce (1987) identifies three main stances towards the education of the young child. The 'empiricist' view takes the role of the adult as being to identify the knowledge, skills and concepts that the child lacks and to transmit these to him/her. This implies a deficit model of the child and one where children are seen as beings to be shaped to take their place in society. Bruce describes how this stance came to the fore in the late 1960's with the movement for compensatory education. This stance does, however, give value to the role of the



teacher. The idea that children come to school knowing very little and have to be taught elevates the status of the teacher.

She places the 'nativist' stance at the opposite end of the spectrum. This stems from the thinking of Rousseau (1762). Here the child is viewed as biologically pre-programmed to develop in certain ways, helped or hindered by variations in the environment. This view results in a feeling that adults should not interfere in the child's learning and that this could be harmful. Aspects of the child's world, such as play are seen as private and sacrosanct.

These opposing ideologies may be more real in theory than in practice, but aspects of each could influence thinking about children and approaches to their education. The polarisation of views that may result are unhelpful to those having to make sense of the rhetoric in the classroom. However, Bruce identifies a third stance: the 'interactionist' view. This provides a more sophisticated view of the child and emphasises reciprocity as being the key to education. This stance takes the role of the adult as crucial to the development of the child. For example, the importance of reciprocity in conversation between adult and child is shown by Wells (1983).

Bruce explains,

Adults are seen as the means, the mechanism by which children can develop strategies, their *own* strategies, initiatives and responses, and construct their own rules which enable their development..... They (children) are supported by adults who help them make maximal use of the environment (Bruce, 1987, p.7).

This view of the child as an active learner together with the importance of the adult's role in this reflects my own beliefs as described above. Whether the eclecticism described by HMI (DES 1989) is a result of an uncertainty about the teacher's role

or whether it arises from a belief that this is the way that children will learn to read, is uncertain. However, my intention in this research was to look closely into the role of the teacher of early reading in order to arrive at a more satisfactory explanation of that role.

Furthermore, I believe that research into reading has not given enough attention to the teacher of reading, having concentrated on the child's interaction with the text. For example, Bryant and Bradley's (1985) work on phonological awareness; earlier studies on readability and on text (Gilliand 1972, Strickland 1962); the development of reading concepts (Clay 1979, Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982); and comprehension (Oakhill and Garnham 1988). Also, it is a function of the predominance of experimental research into reading that, in attempts to limit the variables affecting the research, the cocktail of influences on the child's learning are removed. Most often, because the research is undertaken with children by an outsider, one of the variables that is removed is the teacher and, even when it is the teacher who undertakes the research herself, other variables which would normally be present are eliminated. Having said this, there *are* studies which focus on the teacher and teaching and these are considered in the next chapter.

### A focus on reading

Up to this point I have used both the word 'reading' and the word 'literacy' about the subject of the research. It is important right from the start to clarify both in what it was that I was interested and on what it was that I was focussing. Firstly, it was reading in particular that was my interest. It is an area about which much is written and yet there is no agreement as to how it should be taught. Even Adams' (1990) extensive review, while highlighting the importance of phonics stressed that the way

these are introduced is crucial. By reading, I mean the child's ability to decode *and* to understand text. By text, I mean any piece where written symbols are used to denote meaning. That is, I was concerned with more than the decoding of print, rather with children's growing ability to understand and respond to what they read. An acknowledgement of this is important at this stage in that it clearly shaped what I observed in the classroom and the judgements I made about teachers' and children's actions. Green (1992) describes any perspective as a lens through which a researcher examines a topic. 'This lens (is) a selective one that orients the researcher to particular phenomena, questions, approaches and interpretations' (p.31).

However, although it was the teaching of reading that I sought to find out more about, I felt it was important to take into account more than reading. Therefore, for the most part of this study, it was the teaching of literacy that was examined. Teaching in the early years has recently placed more emphasis on the development of literacy as a whole (e.g. Holdaway 1979, Barrs and Thomas 1991). The interrelationship between reading and writing is also stressed in the Programmes of Study of the National Curriculum (DES 1990a). Reading and writing are considered together as well as separately, placing emphasis on the reading of children's writing and the writing by children of books to be read. Indeed, research (Mommers, 1987) supports the view that developments in reading, writing and spelling are intimately connected. It would be impossible to study the teaching of reading without looking at the range of encounters with text that a child has, whether it is written by him/herself or by another author. In the examination of the evidence available about the learning and teaching of reading it was important, therefore to consider writing where this might impact upon reading.



For these reasons I looked at both reading and writing in the classroom. The view that reading and writing are interlinked has influenced my thinking about research in reading and was a very relevant factor in my own research design. In Chapter Three I shall consider further how I chose what to record and how I recorded it.

### **A View of Research into Reading**

Both as a teacher and as a researcher I have felt dissatisfaction with much research into reading. There are three reasons for this: first, the choice of the methodology; second, the underlying premises adopted in the research; and third, though related to the other two, the unreliability of measures used. A review of the major reading research journals shows that the majority of reading research is in the field of cognitive and social psychology (Bloome 1993) and that the methods adopted are mostly experimental. As discussed earlier, this can take the child out of the context of the classroom and attempt to ensure validity by removing all the 'noise' which is, in fact, an integral part of the complex context in which the teaching takes place. Robinson (1987, cited in Bloome 1993) argued,

It will no longer do to think of reading as a solitary act in which a mainly passive reader responds to cues in a text to find meaning..... They (reading and writing) are complex human activities taking place in complex human relationships (p.329).

In addition to research in the field of cognitive and social psychology, other research reports (e.g. from HMI) have tended to be large scale surveys which can give useful indications but, in the search for generalisability, tend to sweep too broadly to provide a detailed picture.

Secondly, much research into reading has tended to define reading as reader/text interaction in which various aspects of reading or various types of reading can be



examined. However, these are considered from the perspective of the intellectual processes involved rather than how these may be influenced by the context of a classroom situation. As, for example, the use of non-words in the study of decoding (e.g. Ehri, 1995).

Thirdly, the experimental methodology leads to a need for measurement of the learning and this, in itself, is problematic. For example, research that shows children to have made improvement on a particular measure of reading ability through certain methods of teaching reading really only proves the effectiveness of the methods to develop those abilities tested (e.g. ILEA 1988). There is as yet little evidence of assessment of progress on a broader front where this is related to a wider definition of teaching than method. It is not within the scope of this study to consider this relationship but it is possible that further studies could look at the relationship between the aspects of practice identified here and children's progress in reading.

### **What Was this Piece of Research About ?**

#### The teaching of reading

The question of how to teach children to read is one that faces teachers every day with advice from colleagues, inservice courses and the media. Theories of learning studied during initial teacher training tend to advocate the active involvement of the child and the development of autonomous learners. The National Curriculum (DES 1990a) emphasises the importance of comprehension and response to reading as well as learning decoding skills. Decoding skills themselves often appear to be the only factor in media discussions about the teaching of reading.

Similarly survey reports which adopt a broad sweep interpretation tend to label practice as adopting certain methods rather than explaining what those methods involve for the teacher in the classroom. For example a 'phonic method' describes the focus but not the practice. Perhaps the most realistic labels that have appeared in recent years are those of 'eclectic' approach (DES 1989) and a 'combination' of approaches (Cato, Fernandes, Gorman and Kispal 1992).

Research emphasis on the child's interaction with the text and the kind of text used has also led to an overemphasis on the importance of the text. This emphasis on the materials used over and above the importance of what the teacher does, has been stressed on both sides of the debate. In the wake of the controversy over the teaching of reading in Bromley, the then Director of Education for Kent was reported to have said 'What we want are reading schemes that teach children to read' p. 8 (Bayliss 1988). Indeed, from the opposing position, Waterland (1985) in her explanation of her approach to the use of non scheme books reiterated a similar view when she said 'It is the book that will do the teaching' (p.16). These views are likely to lead to a feeling of marginalisation on the part of the teacher.

This study represents an attempt to employ less common (in this area) ethnographic approaches to research in order to try to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the classroom. Theories arising from experimental research about what helps children learn to read have been slow to influence practice. For example the work on onset and rime (Bryant and Bradley 1985, Goswami 1991) which is largely unknown by classroom teachers. Other movements, for example the 'Apprenticeship Approach' (or 'Real Books') (Waterland 1985) have a seemingly large impact, however, even these are rarely taken on intact. They can have as many versions as

there are teachers. This study approached the issue from the other direction. It asked the question 'What are teachers actually doing in the classroom to teach children to read ?'

This study comes at a time of great change in education and one where teachers are feeling under scrutiny from Government and the media about their practices. This is more evident in the teaching of literacy than any other area. In addition, the advent of testing at seven has focused attention on teaching in the early years. Whilst a recognition that this stage is important is to be welcomed, it adds another pressure on the teachers of the younger children.

### Teacher Role

Recognition of the importance of the adult in children's learning leads to a focus on the teacher. Indeed the role of the teacher in learning has been a subject of discussion for many years. The Plowden Report (DES 1967) was criticised for ignoring the positive role of the teacher for fear of authoritarianism (Peters 1969). The picture of good practice presented by Plowden was idealised; although much was written about learning, there was little about teaching. Only one method of teaching was presented. This ideal of total individualisation of learning, has been attempted in many primary schools but even the Plowden Committee admitted it was not possible.

Hall (1987) criticised the Plowden Report for giving 'the green light to the introduction of many unproven progressive ideas in our primary schools' (p.24). She centred her criticism on the integrated day which she implied signifies the absence of sustained input by the teacher causing children to pursue interests at only a superficial level. She discussed the way choice can cause a child to waste time or

'fritter' it away without the teacher keeping track of what is happening. The integrated day is an organisation system which can either work in the way described by Hall or which can actually enable the teacher to spend time working with targeted groups rather than the whole class. Choice can also be used in a number of ways which do not have to be as she described. However, she pinpointed an important issue; the fact that the rhetoric of the Plowden Report, which emphasised learning over and above teaching, seemed to deny teachers a positive role. This, Hall stated, has caused teachers to, 'succumb to a massive loss of nerve and themselves equate class teaching in all its variety with a rigid formalism which had long since disappeared' (p.24).

Alexander (1988) examined teachers' views on the divide between the Plowden ideal and the demands on a teacher in the eighties. He found some teachers experienced a great sense of mismatch between the ideal and reality, they felt themselves to be walking an 'ideological tightrope'. Some teachers dealt with this by having half the curriculum flexible and the other half (usually Mathematics and Language) non-negotiable. Teachers described feelings of guilt associated with structure, but guilt also in relation to the need for accountability and control. Alexander argued that these feelings are avoidable; flexibility is more about freedom to think and act independently than having to conform to a perceived approved style.

The rationalisation of the ideologies as provided by Bruce (1987) demonstrates how education is moving away from the polarisation of the conflicting ideologies of empiricism and nativism. However, when approaches are oversimplified and set in unrealistic opposition to each other, as in a tabloid view of education, little help is given to the confidence of teachers who try to make sense of the conflicting messages received and can only add to a feeling of uncertainty about the role of the teacher.



Also, when the most usual description of the teacher of reading relates to 'method' which no longer seems to describe accurately what teachers do, an informed debate about the role of the teacher in children learning to read is difficult to achieve.

In an earlier work (Fisher 1992) I considered four roles for the teacher of reading at Key Stage One: facilitator, model, manager and assessor. These were based on a review of the research evidence and my own experience of teaching and observing in infant classrooms. These roles, while being appropriate for the audience intended in that book, are really an oversimplification. They were a first attempt to describe what teachers do and have led me to want to examine teachers' action while teaching reading in more depth. It is only through a better *explanation* of what teachers do that their role in developing reading can be more clearly defined.

### **What Were the Aims of the Research ?**

The purpose of this research was to examine the role of the teacher in the early teaching of reading. The main aim was to analyse the action of the teacher while engaged in the teaching of literacy. The intention was not to enter the debate about teaching method but to contribute to understanding of what teachers do in order to inform and explain practice. That is, I started from the teacher rather than from the text or the child as is more usually the focus of research into the teaching of reading. I was seeking an analysis of practice in the initial teaching of reading that did not relate to method or programme but that provided a better explanation of what teachers do.

By 'role' in this context I mean the active part played by teachers in children learning to read, that is what they do in the classroom to engage children in literacy

learning. Although the whole social context of the classroom is of importance in what the child takes from the situation (Delamont 1976), in this study I focused only on the teacher. This was not because I did not consider the *impact* of the teacher's action on the child to be important but that, as a first stage in understanding the role of the teacher, it was the *teacher's* action in which I was interested. This is not the same as an experimental approach which seeks to reduce variables. I have not considered the teachers *in isolation* from their pupils, but *focused* only on their part in the whole scene. I did not intend to evaluate the efficacy of the teacher at this time; only to analyse the teacher's action. Nor did I measure the influence that the teacher undoubtedly had through aspects of the hidden curriculum. In order to describe and analyse teachers' actions I observed teachers at work. How successful they were is another dimension that could be considered by further research. An important element of my focus was the teachers' intentions. There is an instance in my data where the teacher responds enthusiastically but briefly to some Walt Disney books that a child brings from home. She explained afterwards that she hated this type of book but wanted to respond positively to a book brought from home. In this case I was interested in the words the teacher used and the intention she said she had, not whether she was successful in the impression she gave to the particular child. I was concerned with the actions taken by the teacher in relation to literacy, those that were overt and intentional, if not necessarily planned.

A further aim was to develop a model of teaching which would offer a way of analysing practice, as distinct from programme or method. This model is not intended to replace the idea of method but to help practising and trainee teachers to map existing and new 'methods' onto a framework that makes sense to them.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter opened with my own personal journey to the point at the start of this study. My experience of both classroom based research and teaching has led me to a dissatisfaction with much of research into the initial teaching of reading and a desire for greater clarity in descriptions of the role of the teacher. I have also described the assumptions and beliefs that I bring with me to the research. I have tried to explain them and briefly to justify them because of their impact on the focus and design of this research.

I have considered the way primary teachers have suffered in recent years from a sense of uncertainty about their role. The ideologies of child centredness and individualisation have placed impossible pressures on teachers of large classes with often inadequate resources. The criticisms ever present in the press only add to their concern. This research aimed to examine what the teacher of early reading does in order to explain her practice and to provide a better model of teaching than that of 'method'.

There have been several studies of the factors that go together to make a good teacher in the 1980's and these are discussed in the next chapter. These show the efforts made by teachers to achieve a high standard and the high profile afforded to literacy in the infant classroom. They also show how important the individual teacher is in the progress made by the child. Yet research into reading still tends to concentrate on the child and the text apart from the context in which the learning takes place.

In the next chapter I want to discuss some of the research that examines the importance of the adult in children's learning and also some of the evidence that is

available about classroom practice. This has been influential in the design of my own study, both in developing my concern for a better description of the teacher of early reading and in the way I have observed the teachers during this project.



## CHAPTER TWO

### A LOOK AT THE LITERATURE

In Britain and Australia, they call it teaching. In the United States and Canada, they call it instruction. Whatever terms we use, we have come to realise in recent years that the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement. The restructuring of schools, the composition of national and provincial curricula, the development of bench mark assessments - all these are of little value if they do not take the teacher into account. Teachers don't merely deliver the curriculum. They develop it, define it, and reinterpret it too. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get. Growing appreciation of this fact is placing working with teachers and understanding teaching at the top of our research and improvement agendas. (Hargreaves (1991) p.vi).

#### Introduction

In the first chapter I have tried to place my study within a personal perspective. I described my thoughts up to the start of the research and considered some of the assumptions that I have brought with me to the work. In this chapter I want to adopt a wider perspective and to examine the importance of such a study at this time. It is not my intention to provide an overview of research into reading itself; this vast area is already well documented. Instead, I want to consider some of the evidence about what happens inside classrooms and what this tells us about the role of the teacher. In the first instance I want to examine evidence about the importance of the teacher and secondly to consider what we can learn about what teachers do when teaching reading in the early years. Initially, I felt it was important also to tease out those elements that appeared to be linked to children making progress, i.e. elements described as 'effective' or 'good' practice. It seemed to me that it would be here that the significant aspects of teacher practice might be found.

This chapter also needs to be seen as part of the journey that this study represents in my own understanding of research. In the first instance I came to the literature with a view to finding out what studies had previously been undertaken into teaching, in particular into teaching reading. The focus and design of these studies contributed significantly to the design of the first part of my research. The influence of these studies will be discussed later. In retrospect, I can see that, despite my stated intention of wanting to find out more about the teacher of reading, I was too greatly influenced by previous researchers' views of what mattered. Using evidence from the studies discussed below to design my own study resulted in the findings of the first part of the study being more limited than I had intended. However, it is relevant to consider these at this stage because of the influence they had on the design of the first part of the study and also because of the reflections they invite in discussion of the results of the second part of the study (see Chapter Five). A summary of the findings of these studies which guided the design of the first part of my research can be seen in Table One on page 55.

I shall start by looking at the nature of the social and linguistic context of children's learning and how this can influence children's response. Research into the home situation which provides a comparison with school learning shows aspects of the school situation in an unfavourable light as a learning context for the young child. Studies of children working with teachers show how the child's interpretation of the context affects the child's response. Secondly, I shall show evidence that what teachers do affects both what children learn and their performance when certain measures of progress are applied. I shall consider several studies of classroom practice from the eighties and early nineties both from the point of view of what they were trying to do and in terms of their findings. My intention is to argue that the

teacher is central to an understanding of children's learning in school. This tenet is fundamental to the need for and intentions of this study.

Following the discussion of the importance of context and the role of the adult in children's learning I shall consider the way in which my study, ultimately differs from previous studies in both design and intent and why this needs to be so.

### **Social and Linguistic Context**

Research into children learning to read has provided evidence about how children read and also about what previous knowledge and experience might be considered a good predictor of reading ability. However, as discussed in Chapter One, many of these studies have been undertaken under experimental conditions where the variables were limited in order to examine the process uncluttered by unwanted external influences. In this type of research often a test group is considered alongside a control group to assess the influence of various factors. This approach to research removes the learning from the context in which it takes place. In a social constructivist view of learning the child actively attempts to interpret the context and the intentions of those involved in the interaction. This points to the need for research into the *contexts* of children learning to read. It is the social and linguistic context as highlighted by the work of Vygotsky and Bruner in which I am interested, in particular, the interaction between adult and child

Although more naturalistic studies of children learning to read are unusual, there have been several studies undertaken in the eighties into the home and school contexts in general that have provided useful insights into the importance of the adult in learning and give some indications of problems children may encounter when

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learning at school. These studies paint a generally uncomplimentary picture of the quality of interaction in the school setting. The question arises from these about the nature of the role of the teacher and the extent to which this can or should be like that of a parent. These studies are relevant here, not only for the way in which they highlight the important role of the adult and the active involvement of the child in his or her learning, but also in that they take the child at the moment of starting, or just before starting, school. The first teacher is then faced with children in a new situation, particularly in terms of the nature of the interaction in which the children are expected to engage. The eighties have seen a shift in emphasis from lack of progress being seen largely as a function of disadvantaged home background to scrutiny of the school situation.

Earlier studies had emphasised the detrimental effect of what was seen as a poor home background on children's language development (Bernstein 1960). This led to a deficit model of the child starting school which tended to lay the blame for lack of progress on the child or his/her home background. The studies discussed below challenged this view by studying the home background and analysing parent-child interaction. These have provided me with two relevant strands for my research. Not only does their analysis of the valuable learning contexts in the home highlight the child's active involvement in learning and the importance of the adult but also it shifts some of the responsibility to the teacher. From these studies it can be argued that children's failure can no longer be blamed only on home background - the teacher has a crucial role to play and does make a difference.

Until recently, successful home learning had been associated with what was considered the 'good' home background. The advent of the use of radio microphones



and video cameras opened up the home to more rigorous scrutiny and revealed a wealth of learning taking place in most home situations. The Bristol Language Development Project (Wells 1987) showed children learning language through interpersonal relationships in every home. Their findings suggest that social background is not a strong determinant of either rate or style of development except at the extremes of the socio-economic scale. They did not argue that differences in rate of development were in no way attributable to social environment but that there was no a priori reason to believe that such differences were based on class or code as Bernstein (1960) had suggested. However, they do note that literacy related measures were linked to family background in the way that oral measures were not. This is supported by the findings of Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar and Plewis. (1988) and Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll and Ecob. (1988), discussed below (p. 43), who show that the individual teacher makes more difference to a child's rate of progress in school than does his or her home background, after initial differences have been taken into account.

Wells pointed to the nature of the interaction in the home as being the important factor in rate of language development. He found that reciprocity was fundamental in the conversation of adults and children in the home. In contrast to this, whilst interaction was present in the classroom, this was often asymmetrical with the teacher taking the major part. Also, the pedagogic intent of the teachers and the poor adult-child ratio in the classroom could inhibit interaction.

Wells cited the example of Rosie (pp 94-101), a child whose home might have been classed as disadvantaged, but who used a good range of language in the home and interacted successfully with her mother. However, on starting school Rosie could

well have been judged as having little or no language when the topic was unfamiliar to her and the style of interaction dissimilar to what she had been used in the home. This shows the way the social and linguistic context of the learning is crucial and has an important effect on the way the child responds.

Tizard and Hughes (1984) provide further evidence about the child's active involvement in learning and the centrality of the adult in this. They also show the adult-child interaction in the school in an unfavourable light as compared to that of the home. In a study of 30 girls in London, they followed closely the interaction between mother and child in the home and compared this to the adult/child interaction in the Nursery. They studied fifteen children in each of two social class groups and found learning in the home in which the mothers discussed a wide range of topics and used recognisably educational contexts such as play, games and stories.

They isolate the special characteristics of home learning in the following ways:

- i) the mothers' desire for their children to learn was often more important than the activity from which it arose;
- ii) much general knowledge was transmitted, particularly of the social world;
- iii) learning occurred in a context of great meaning to the child;
- iv) dialogue was seen to be as important as physical exploration.

Although this research has been criticised for the smallness of the sample and the fact that it was all girls, the findings do seem to present a picture of children who try to extend their understandings in a persistent and logical way. They also point to the quality of the interaction in the home in contrast to that of the nursery school where the opportunities for interaction and the expectations of the adults were different. They found little direct teaching, less adult-child interaction than in the home and

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that which there was tended to be briefer and more adult dominated. They comment 'in the case of the staff, their educational aims tended to be pursued quite independently of the children, and often without any relation to their interests' (p.212). They advocate more opportunity for adult/child interaction of the kind found in the home and higher expectations of the children.

In another study in Canada, Juleibo (1985) studied a group of children and showed how literacy was emerging in the home but could often disappear at school. She identified four major differences between school and home learning:

- i) in the home the child usually initiated the literacy learning rather than the teacher, as happened in school;
- ii) sharing and reciprocity were usual at home, whereas in school children had to fit into a predetermined programme;
- iii) at home the literacy learning related to the child's previous experience and particular frame of reference, whereas in the Nursery many activities were concerned only with the here and now;
- iv) in the home constant feedback was given to encourage a sense of success, while at school errors were often corrected without explanation.

These studies give rise to some criticism of teachers and classrooms. They claim that 'children are reduced for a much greater part of the time (than in the home) to the more passive role of respondent, trying to answer the teacher's many questions and carrying out his or her requests' (Wells 1987, p.87). Wells speculates that children may internalise from this sort of context the following:

- i) that the only valid learning is that which takes place when they are engaged in teacher-prescribed tasks;
- ii) that personal experience, particularly that gained outside the classroom, is unlikely to be relevant for learning at school;

- iii) that taking the initiative is unwise; as thinking things out for oneself frequently leads to unacceptable answers, it is better to play safe - to follow only the steps laid down by the teacher. (pp. 93-4)

Although Wells shows the child being expected to take a passive role in the interaction in the classroom, other evidence shows that children are actively engaged in making sense of the situations in which they find themselves. This is not contradictory as both conditions can exist side by side. However, this does have implications for research into learning in that the context is not only the context as provided by the teacher but also the context as perceived by the child.

An example of this is given by Desforges, Bennett and Cockburn (1985) in a study of year two classes. They describe an observation of a teacher giving a writing lesson in which her intention was to stimulate the children's imaginations to produce a piece of creative writing. Although the introduction of the session focussed on the content and potential creativity of the writing by demonstrating a working model of a volcano, the comments made by the teacher during the session concentrated on the neatness and tidiness of the writing. The children themselves were obviously well versed in this teacher's approach and duly produced very predictable and short accounts of the demonstration. Teachers working on the National Writing Project (1985-1989) reported similar phenomena. Children saw writing as being 'to put on the wall' and needing 'a sharp pencil'. One child, when asked what was important about writing, held up his index finger and said, 'The finger, because if you don't put your finger on the page when you've finished a word, it won't be any good' (National Writing Project Newsletter 1, 1985 and Huart, 1989).

Doyle (1986) describes this as children's 'interpretive competence', i.e. the ways in which pupils select the information which enables them to get the teacher's praise. He says this is often in opposition to what the teacher thinks she is saying that she



wants. The amount of praise is a powerful indicator for children (particularly young children who do not yet receive marks or grades for work) as to what the teacher is really serious about.

It may seem that the youngest children in school have not yet become sufficiently versed in the ways of teachers and school to interpret teachers in this sophisticated way. However, there is evidence that they *are* sensitive to ways of gaining praise. Desforges and Cockburn (1987) cite a study in a pre-school play group (Ward and Rowe 1985) in which one example has a group of four year olds playing with dough at a table. Each child was working on their own particular project until one made a ring and offered it to the play-leader. She said "How lovely" and kept the ring on her finger. Immediately all the other children gave up their own projects and made rings which they gave to the teacher. Such a scenario will be familiar to teachers of the youngest children in school and demonstrates clearly how the classroom is an arena in which all the participants actively interpret and act upon the signals they perceive from the other contributors.

These studies have provided me with insight into a key aspect of the focus and design of this study, that is they highlight the way in which the social and linguistic context of the learning is central to how the child responds within that context and the important role of the adult in this. They are, however, critical of children's early experiences of school and show teacher-child interaction in an unfavourable light as compared to the interaction in the home. These, then, are important aspects of what happens within the classroom and it will be interesting to reconsider these elements in the light of data collected during this project.

### **Evidence that Teaching Is Important**

Whereas studies of children's learning in the home have concentrated attention on adult-child interaction, studies of school learning tend to focus more on the curriculum and its organisation. However, these studies do show the importance of what the teacher does although their focus is not directly on the teacher him/herself. There is a range of studies, particularly undertaken in the seventies, which examine the relationship between the method adopted by the teacher and what aspects of the reading process children learn. In the eighties several studies have been undertaken which have looked at classroom practice in primary schools. These studies of classroom practice from the last decade or more have provided me with data about what happens in classrooms. They have reinforced my belief in the centrality of the teacher in the success of children's learning and have been influential in the design of the first part of this study.

Evidence in this area comes from a variety of sources. National Surveys by HMI provide a collection of observations collated into fairly objective reports of practice. There have also been a number of research studies undertaken. These set out to collect data using a variety of selection and assessment procedures which attempt to achieve objectivity but may be limited by the parameters of the study. Few of these focus directly on reading although many refer to it. Here they provide evidence of the importance of the teacher in children's learning, give some indications of what teachers do, and show examples of ways in which research has approached the study of teaching. What they do not provide is a model of teaching reading that is independent of a particular method.

Studies of classroom practice examined here fall into four main types:

- i) studies of method or programme effect where the research is designed to consider the impact of the teaching programme on what pupils learn;
- ii) surveys undertaken by HMI and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which report on practice;
- iii) studies of school or teacher effectiveness, where the research is looking at factors that may contribute to a successful school; and
- iv) studies which look at classrooms; these studies fall into two types, those that consider organisation and those that look at task design.

### Studies of the effect of the reading method used

Earlier studies into the teaching of reading have shown the effect on the child's learning of the method used. These studies give useful indications of the effect of the teaching on the child. I only cite here an example of these rather than a detailed review. The purpose of their inclusion is to show the impact of teaching on learning to read. I do not want to consider these in any detail as I feel that they paint only a general picture as they take a programme or method and assume that this describes what the teacher actually does day to day in the classroom. According to the theory, teaching methods can be placed along a continuum from an essentially didactic, skills based model at one end to a child centred, whole language approach where the child's interest and experience provides a starting point for learning at the other. In reality, as evidenced by HMI (1989, 1990), Cato et al. (1992) and my own experience, classroom teachers develop their own individual style, choosing from methods and resources based on their own particular preference and circumstances.

The studies discussed below show the complex relationship between active learner and active teacher, that is that children receive instruction differentially according to factors outside the programme of instruction. It seems that, at times, the individual teacher who mediates the instruction has greater effect than the programme itself. Research discussed here supports this view and gives some indications of the idiosyncratic way in which teachers develop their own approach. It points to indications other than programme or method as being at least equally influential in determining progress. This study, therefore, sought to find a better description of what the teacher of early reading does.

The effect of the type of instruction on different groups of children is interesting in that it shows that children do not learn to read uniformly but that what the teacher does will influence what is learned, although effects may be different on different children. This appears to be the case particularly with those children of lower ability. There is some evidence (Barr 1972, Guthrie 1973) that children learn the skills that are emphasised by the method used, but that it is only those children of higher ability who gain further skills in spite of or in addition to what is taught. Good readers are able to build the subskills of reading into a single process whereas those who are underachieving gain a number of independent skills without being able to weave them into a coherent process.

These studies, undertaken in the seventies, looked particularly at skills based methods and considered the effects of phonic as opposed to whole word programmes. Research (Clay 1979) into several reading programmes found that instruction did



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not appear to interfere with the best and average readers but that the poorest tended to be doing exactly and only what they were taught and appeared to have become instruction dependent. It was found that the more structured the programme the more effect this had. On the other hand, using miscue analysis (Goodman 1967) and informal observation, I analysed the reading behaviour of eight and nine year olds who had been learning to read through an apprenticeship approach. I noticed that some children tended to overrely on the teacher when contextual cues failed as they had not managed to 'catch' appropriate decoding skills for themselves (Fisher 1989). Here it was not so much that children had become instruction dependent as that they had become teacher dependent. This is ironic in an approach that is meant to foster independence and confidence.

The studies above show that the teaching children receive acts upon them according to their ability and what the teacher does. Moreover, the more the method is towards one or other end of the continuum described above the more restricting this influence may be. This emphasises the importance of better knowledge about what the teacher does. However, evidence based on research into methods or programmes can, I believe, only give an incomplete picture as, I shall argue, that teachers mostly do not employ a particular method but adopt elements from various methods.

This view is supported by recent surveys and reports (DES 1990b, Cato et al. 1992). These find that teachers do not adhere closely to one particular method, rather they are eclectic combining a variety of methods. As early as 1971, Goodacre (1971) stressed that children's progress in reading was much more closely related to the quality of the teacher than to the programme used. Similarly Chall (1967) in the USA found that children's involvement in learning to read depended more on the

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atmosphere created by the class teacher than the programme used. The Bullock Report (DES 1975) concluded that research was unable to identify more effective methods, 'there is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read' (p. 521). In fact, the Report states that 'the teacher is the biggest single factor for success in learning to read' (p.212). In a very detailed overview of research into language programmes Adams (1990), with particular reference to phonics instruction, says that statistical analyses show that research into methods indicates many 'method effects' but also many 'side effects' (such as community, school, classroom, teacher and pupil characteristics), but that there are few interactions between the two. Adams concludes that both the type of programme used and classroom delivery affect learning.

However, from personal experience and evidence from HMI (DES 1990b) and Cato et al. (1992), in England, we would appear to have (as yet) a less programme driven regime. Teachers act as individuals making choices about what they do in the classroom that do not adhere to any one method. The flaw in the notion of a continuum at the start of this section is that, whilst it is descriptive of a situation in theory, it does not explain or provide a coherent model that unites practice in the early teaching of reading. It tells us where the differences lie not where the similarities are. It seems to me that it is better descriptions of what actually happens in classrooms that are needed to provide a model of those theories that may unite teachers in a way that makes sense to them, rather than a model based on theoretical notion of 'methods'.

### Surveys of primary literacy teaching

HMI and NFER provide a useful historical perspective on practice in the teaching of

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reading. They give a relatively objective, though possibly rather impressionistic, view of practice which reflects current thoughts about the teaching of reading at the time of publication. They also reflect public concern about reading standards and address concerns about the role of the teacher in the teaching of reading. There is a focus on method but a shift can be detected over time away from an attempt to identify successful *methods* to the identification of interpersonal and organisational strategies that may result in effective practice. Whilst it is only recently that criteria for the judgement of practice have been published (OFSTED 1993a), these reports described what the writers considered to be good practice. Successful practices were judged in relation to national norms as decided by nationally recognised tests and inspectors' overview of children's performance across the country.

Several of the recent HMI reports have considered the teacher's role in early literacy learning. Primary Education in England (DES 1978) looked at teachers in classes of seven, nine and eleven year olds. They found that less than one in twenty teachers relied mainly on an 'exploratory method' of teaching while about three quarters employed a mainly didactic approach and that where they used a combination of approaches children scored better on the NFER reading and mathematics tests. In the vast majority of classes reading schemes and programmes were used to provide material at the right level of difficulty and were used regularly. HMI affirm unequivocally that 'teachers ..... work hard to ensure that children master the basic techniques of reading and writing' (5.46).

Four years later the First School survey (DES 1982a) was published, although this referred to circumstances found in schools in 1977-1979. It also found great emphasis placed on the teaching of reading with a combination of the 'look and say' and

'phonic' methods being employed. It seems to reinforce the view that a purely didactic approach is insufficient. Many schools were criticised for an 'unduly long concentration on the basic reading scheme' (2.3), and few instances were seen of children becoming engrossed in books. It was also felt that children were introduced too soon to a reading scheme and phonic practice with the result that some were confused and made little progress.

A report on practice of probationary teachers was also published in 1982 (DES 1982b). This shifted the focus from method to organisational and interpersonal aspects of the teacher's role. Amongst other issues this considered the teacher's language work. HMI comment that, while some teachers interact well with their pupils, others used a high proportion of 'closed' activities where children had little opportunity to question. A number of factors which emphasise the role of the teacher were identified as being most frequently associated with what HMI defined as 'good practice'. These included pupils' participation, interest and involvement; good organisation showing balance variety and effective use of resources using appropriate questioning techniques; good relationships with mutual respect; good planning, preparation and match.

In the late eighties with the resurgence of the public debate about methods of teaching reading these again were the focus of HMI reports. However, the importance of the teacher engaging the child in a range of literacy activities was stressed, together with the way he or she assessed and recorded this. The findings of the survey of reading teaching in schools undertaken in 1989 (DES 1989) rehearsed some previous points and introduced some new ones. They reported that most schools used one or more graded reading scheme supported by other books. It described teachers as being



eclectic in their choice of method and reported that almost eighty five per cent used a blend of methods to teach initial reading. Record keeping in years one and two came under particular criticism for recording only *what* was read not *how* it was read. Good practice observed included records of attitudes and skills and a reading interview based on a core text.

This focus on practice put teachers, as opposed to methods, clearly in the spotlight. It was reported that teachers did not challenge the good readers and there was insufficient differentiation. In schools where books were valued silent reading sessions were usually successful. However, poor use was made of reference books. There was often no clear linking of school policy to what teachers did in the classroom. They were seen to give too little feedback and to provide little variety and experiment for children in response to texts.

A survey published a year later (DES 1990b) again emphasised the high priority given to teaching children to read at Key Stage One and again focused on teacher practice. The report criticised teachers who adopted a narrow approach either using, as described by the teachers themselves 'real books' (five per cent) or 'phonic teaching' (about three per cent). Both approaches were judged to have limitations. Children in the classes that had too narrow a focus on phonics were found to have too few strategies to tackle new words and did not read for meaning even when they read the words accurately. Teachers who described their approach as 'real books' were reported to assume that children would gain independence with minimal help from the teacher. This is not to say that HMI implied disagreement with either phonics or 'real books', rather that they felt that a narrow approach limited progress. Here HMI tried to identify elements of what they considered to be good practice in the

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teaching of reading. Those schools that were judged to achieve high standards of reading shared four common characteristics:

- \* a firm leadership that established reading as a high priority in the school;
- \* a clear, well documented, balanced reading policy;
- \* well-managed classroom practice with work matched to individual needs; and
- \* a wide variety of appropriate books and other materials, effectively organised.

Cato et al. (1992) undertook a survey of the teaching of initial literacy by way of a questionnaire and case studies of a subsample of participating schools. They found that most teachers claimed to use a variety of methods and added, 'Indeed, this has been a consistent finding in all the main studies of reading carried out in England' (p.41). They reported marked differences between the teachers observed in terms of competence as effective managers of children and of time. Indeed they cited time as being the resource that was held to be in most short supply for most teachers. They summarised the characteristics of those teachers who carried out their work most effectively as:

- \* having a kind and caring manner;
- \* being able to prevent 'clamour' and give children autonomy within clear boundaries;
- \* using spare moments effectively for learning;
- \* extending children's language through questioning;
- \* combining discipline with informality.

Here the importance of organisation and interpersonal relationships was seen to be

more important than method.

In addition to the HMI surveys I have looked at research studies which provide useful insights into what the teacher does in the classroom and, in some instances, how effective this is. These cover all the curriculum areas but give quite full analysis of the teaching of literacy. The foci of these studies are the effectiveness of individual schools, the organisation of the learning in individual classrooms and the design of the tasks set by the teacher. Most of the studies cited below cover all the curriculum and are not specifically focused on the teaching of reading, although this is referred to in the studies. The picture emerges of extremely hardworking and conscientious teachers doing their utmost to enable children to learn to read and write (and to achieve in other curriculum areas) but demonstrating an ineffectiveness of management that renders some, but by no means all, of their efforts in vain. In addition to this, there is indication of a conflict in teachers' minds about the nature of their role. This is evidenced in the studies by the sometimes contradictory messages teachers can give to children about their intentions.

### Studies of school effectiveness

Whilst HMI provide a broad sweep description of practice in schools and begin to identify elements of what they consider to be good practice in the teaching of reading, studies of *school effectiveness* are a relatively new area for educational research in this country and only in the 1980's did a body of research findings begin to emerge (Reynolds and Cuttance, 1992). In addition, most studies have been into secondary school effectiveness. However, two studies (Mortimore et al., Tizard et al., 1988;) do give us some insights into the factors

that go to make up effective primary schools as seen by the research teams. It should be recognised though that these do not claim causality. These studies, while providing some useful indications of what might be effective practice raise questions about how that practice is described, particularly in the case of the teaching of reading. although they avoid the label of a particular 'method', they focus on programme used and broad descriptive measures such as time, content and intentions which do not give a detailed picture of what the teacher does. These studies, however, provided me with a starting point for further, in depth, analysis of the teacher of reading in the classroom.

In a search for what makes schools 'effective', Mortimore et al.(1988) followed 2,000 junior school pupils through four years of classroom life in 50 schools in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). They found that 'the school makes a far greater contribution to the explanation of progress than is made by pupils' background characteristics and age' (p. 204). They stress that observation reveals that teachers do not always teach in the way they describe to researchers, for example in the amount of class teaching undertaken.

In their consideration of the teaching of reading they focused on the programme used, the reading activities undertaken by the teacher and the amount of teacher time spent engaged in these. They found that almost all teachers (95%) in the sample taught at least some language as a distinct subject and nearly half included it in project work. The vast majority of teachers made use of reading schemes although the use declined over the years. In the first year (National Curriculum Year 3) all teachers used at least one scheme, and most made use of more than one. The amount of time teachers spent on hearing reading fell from just over 5% in the first year to just under 2.5%



in year three (N.C. Yr. 5). There is no mention of the quiet reading time when all children and the teacher read that was advocated by Southgate, Arnold and Johnson (1981) but they do report that 10% of the time spent hearing an individual child read was spent in talking to the child. No mention was made of teachers trying to deal with other matters at the same time which was picked up by other research studies (Southgate et al. 1981 and Bennett, Desforjes, Cockburn and Wilkinson 1984). 3% of teacher time was spent reading stories although, surprisingly, this was less in year one than in year three. In 80% of the classes children were given different work according to ability but not according to age.

They found reading ability at one age to be a good predictor of reading at a later age but that progress in mathematics and writing was subject to greater change. However, once initial starting points had been taken into account they found the school attended was responsible for 24% of the variation in pupils' reading progress between years three and five although in writing the school accounted for only 13% of the variation. Those schools that had a good effect on reading progress did not necessarily have the same effect with writing; in fact there was more correlation between mathematics and writing.

As a result of their study the authors identified some key factors for effective schools which involved a happy, supportive and supporting staff with a structured framework but allowing some freedom for individual teachers. Within classrooms several factors were found to be important, these included;

- \* flexible organisation to maximise individual contact with pupils;
- \* a limited focus within sessions;
- \* effective means of record keeping;

- \* work forecasts;
- \* the following of school-wide policies;
- \* consistent use of parental involvement where this was more than a PTA;
- \* discussing and explaining the purpose of work.

There were also factors that had a negative effect on performance. For example, where the head teacher placed a narrow emphasis on basic skills the effect was negative on both basic skills and non cognitive areas.

Tizard et al. (1988) studied the effects of school and parents on infant progress with particular attention to ethnic group, social class and gender factors. They focused on the materials used and the aspects of literacy taught. Their work points again to individual teachers having an important influence on the progress the child makes. This was a longitudinal study and interesting in that it compared children from the same school and area but different ethnic origins. They described activities undertaken in the language curriculum as demonstrated by the middle infant classes. In Reading, 6% used one published reading scheme, 88% used a variety of schemes, 59% used Breakthrough to Literacy (Mackay, Thompson and Schaub 1970) and almost all teachers supplemented the schemes to some extent. For writing teachers used Breakthrough to Literacy, Language workbooks, tracing and copying, and some form of stimuli or 'news' as a starting point for writing. In mathematics there was greater reliance on published materials but the authors comment that the teachers' use of published schemes was eclectic and flexible in both mathematics and reading. In language teachers moved from early emphasis on the mechanics, through rules for deciphering and reproducing text and on to reading for meaning and the production of

longer written texts. In handwriting they moved from tracing to copying and on to producing their own text.

There is support for the implications of earlier studies in that they too show indications that children do better at some schools and with some teachers than others. Although the sample was not large, results do suggest that teachers make more difference than the school and, particularly, progress made in reading in the reception class varied enormously. Their findings point in similar directions to other studies in that they emphasise the importance of teachers following a coherent policy for reading, the effect of teacher expectations on the curriculum covered, the value of effective assessment and the importance of the management of learning for effective progress.

The Hackney Literacy Study (ILEA 1988) focused more on the classroom than the school. Although researchers set out to discover whether teachers described as 'developmentalists' were more effective than 'traditionalists' they found that emphasis on literacy and a coherent school policy within a supportive framework was actually more important than the method adopted. Here it is the individual teacher's interpretation of the method that counts and how the teacher's approach is mediated between adult and child in the classroom. Within the classroom they found five broad areas that were identified as relating to progress.

- i) Prominence of literacy in the curriculum, 'In general, pupils who made the most progress in reading were those who were stimulated by a variety of approaches to literacy and where literacy occupied a prominent place in the curriculum' (p.10). This was evidenced by hearing children read two or three times a week, using a wide range of

resources and specific reference to spelling rules (but not spelling tests).

- ii) A pupil centred approach, where the teacher paid particular attention to the interests of the pupils, allowing them to choose books to read and to have read to them and discussing these. This also involved allowing pupils to choose what to write about, particularly their own projects and interests.
- iii) A supportive framework. The building of confidence in writing was found to be related to progress in reading. Children were grouped for writing, given feedback according to their individual efforts, had their work marked, discussed with them and displayed or presented in some way. 'Overall, it would seem that children made greater progress if they worked within a supportive framework receiving constructive, personalised feed-back from the teacher.' (p.11)
- iv) Highly specific records were shown to be more effective than records such as colour coding or recording stages on the reading scheme. Records based on miscue analysis were judged to be the most effective.
- v) Parental involvement in the learning process as part of home school liaison schemes, particularly when organised by the class teacher or a group of teachers.

These studies have identified factors that are found in effective schools or, in the latter case, classrooms. They do not, however, claim causality in that they judge the end product rather than identifying *how* to reach this point. Reynolds and Cuttance (1992) in a critical analysis of British research into school effectiveness regret the fact that school effectiveness researchers do not work with school improvement



programmes as this could give indications of causality. The relevance of these studies here is firstly that they emphasise the importance of the school (and by extension the teaching) in children's progress. This reinforces the view that the teaching that the child receives is an important factor in the child's learning as well as influences of home background and psychological factors in children learning to read. Secondly, these studies are relevant to my research in that they have given me indications of what is considered by a variety of sources to be so-called 'good practice' both in teaching reading and in other curriculum areas. This has provided me with a starting point for the first part of this research.

In retrospect, when reassessing my research after the first part of the study, I found it interesting to consider the way in which research design focused on content and organisational aspects of the teaching of reading whereas the findings pointed towards interpersonal strategies in teaching being more important in the mediation of this content and organisation.

### Research into the organisation of learning

Other classroom based studies have examined the organisation of learning. The School's Council Project Extending Beginning Reading (Southgate et al.) undertaken in the mid seventies and published in 1981 considered reading in years three and four. They focused on the contexts of teaching reading and consider the quality of the practice observed. They again found teachers giving reading a high priority but expending an enormous amount of effort in trying to hear children read, often at the same time as doing many other things. Paradoxically it was found that where teachers placed less emphasis on hearing children read, those children made more progress in reading. In these classes more time was given to uninterrupted silent

reading and talking to children about the books they had read. The recommendations that resulted suggested that children should have more choice of the books that they read, that time spent reading to the teacher should be quality time spent in discussion and appraisal, and that teachers should consider ways of avoiding the lengthy queues that tended to develop.

Galton and Simon (1980) in the ORACLE study conducted research in classrooms in which the team made their own assessments of teaching styles from cluster analysis and observational data based on three years work. The team examined the different organisational strategies employed by teachers in junior classes. They made their own assessment of teaching styles rather than adopt the teachers' judgement. This follows from Bennett's (1976) work where teachers had been found to be inaccurate in the descriptions they gave of their practice. Like Bennett (1976) and Mortimore et al. (1988), they observed that teachers did not always work in the way they described themselves as doing. They found a high priority afforded to language but comment that, as reading at least is individualised, the individual pupil spends less time on language or reading than would appear from a study of the time spent by the teacher engaged in the teaching of reading. They go on to report that the emphasis given to basic skills as a proportion of the total observed lesson time did not correlate positively with progress.

They summarise by concluding that, when the effects of gender, pupil type and teaching styles are considered together, only teaching style appeared to have an independent effect on progress. This was found to be the case even with pupil types where there are differences in the amount of time spent working. In successful teaching styles motivation was not found to affect progress but in less successful

styles well motivated pupils were found to make better progress. They identify some common characteristics among the 'top three' styles.

- \* There were above average levels of interaction with the pupils, that is, higher than average proportion of routine and open ended questions more factual statements, more feedback given and less statements about task supervision.
- \* Teachers devoted considerable effort to ensuring that routine activities proceeded smoothly.
- \* Children were encouraged to work by themselves towards solutions to problems - i.e. teachers either gave such clear instructions that they did not need repeating or they expected children to work out for themselves what they should be doing.

This aspect of classroom research which shows that teachers do not always teach in the way they have said that they do has implications for further research. This is most evident in a research study from the USA described by Clark and Peterson (1986). They report on a study in which Duffy (1977) attempted to describe the distribution of five contrasting approaches to the teaching of reading and then to compare teachers' espoused beliefs with their actual classroom behaviour. Three hundred and fifty teachers sorted statements about reading into categories ranging from 'most like me' to 'least like me'. These statements reflected the different approaches to the teaching of reading. As a result of this only thirty seven out of the three hundred and fifty teachers demonstrated strong 'pure types' of conceptions of reading. 'This finding suggests that perhaps the conceptions that teachers do hold about the teaching of reading do not fit neatly into the research based typology and

that they may be more complex and eclectic than those of reading researchers' (Clark and Peterson p. 287).

Duffy reduced the number of teachers still further to ten who manifested clearly defined beliefs on the teaching of reading and then observed these teachers teaching reading in their own classrooms to ascertain the extent to which their instructional behaviour reflected their expressed convictions. Of these ten only four consistently employed practices which were judged to be consistent with their beliefs. Other teachers were not consistent in maintaining practices true to their beliefs; they were found to be 'smuggling' in elements from other approaches. 'The Duffy study of conceptions of reading portrays a flexible and complex relationship between teachers' implicit theories and their classroom behaviour' (Clark and Peterson, p.289).

This has obvious implications for research into the teaching of reading and any attempts to make practice explicit. Not only do researchers use descriptions of the teaching of reading (method) that are inadequate in explaining what teachers do, but also teachers themselves appear to be unable to make this explicit. In the first instance this has led me to want to look more closely at teachers teaching reading to the youngest children in school in order to produce a model of teaching reading that better explains what teachers do. In retrospect, in the light of my own research, I would also question research into teaching that does not involve the teacher's own definitions. There is a difference between asking teachers to pick out what they do from a pre-determined list and encouraging teachers to define for themselves what it is that they do.



### Research into task design

The studies reported so far have concentrated on programme or school effectiveness or on the organisation of learning in the classroom. Work by Neville Bennett has focussed on how teachers design the activities they provide for children. This research gives us further information about how the teacher works in the classroom and provided me, in the first part of this study, with a way of analysing what the teacher does. It also gives interesting indications about the relationship (or lack of it) between the tasks children are given and the progress they make.

The Quality of Pupil Learning Experiences (Bennett et al. 1984) turned attention to task design in the top infant (N.C. Yr. 2) classroom. They found tasks demanding practice of existing knowledge, concepts or skills predominated particularly in language work and that teachers failed to implement intended demands either through poor diagnosis or misdiagnosis or through failures in task design. High attainers received less new knowledge and more practice than low attainers, and, while teachers saw tasks that were too difficult, they rarely found that tasks were too easy.

Teachers were often found to stress procedural rather than cognitive aims to the children with the result that children may have misunderstood the language demands of the task. For example the teacher emphasised the careful colouring of a phonic work sheet rather than the sound that it was intended to teach. This is in contrast to Wells (1987) and Tizard and Hughes (1984) who found that teachers' concern to get over their educative intentions got in the way of effective interaction. In a similar way teachers tended to concentrate their comments to children on a limited range of criteria, particularly neatness, punctuation, spacing and quantity regardless of their stated aims or of the instructions they had given to the children. Other interesting

indications are also present in their study. In two of the classes teachers did a lot of work on punctuation but according to the monitoring system used in the research these children's punctuation did not improve and, in fact, one class deteriorated. In contrast the class shown to be the most inventive in their writing did not spend an inordinate amount of time on imaginative writing but covered a range of types of writing including free choice, topic writing and poetry.

Reading was observed to comprise phonic tasks, comprehension tasks and reading to the teacher. Like Southgate et al. (1981), Bennett et al. (1984) criticise the practice of hearing children read while attending to other matters. They found that the majority of interaction in classrooms was about spelling.

The conclusions drawn by the authors of this study relate more to the teacher as a manager of time and of learning than to any implication that teachers are not able or conscientious in their work. They criticise the air of 'crisis management' found in some classrooms and the teachers' apparent inability to diagnose needs appropriately.

Similar findings to Bennett et al.'s earlier study were reported in a more recent study by Bennett and Kell (1989) in which they considered the lot of the four year old in school. They reported that, while affective aims were stressed in the philosophy expressed by the teachers, cognitive aims dominated in the curriculum. Again there appeared to be this mismatch between what teachers say about their teaching and what researchers observe them to be doing. Task appropriateness of children's classroom activities was examined in terms of teacher intentions, presentation, match, task implementation and assessment. They found the highest priority given to spoken language and early number with play having very low

priority. Children were found to be often confused and off task waiting to gain the attention of the teacher who had often made his/her initial intention unclear. One task in four was judged to be mismatched with slightly more overestimates than underestimates and even where match was appropriate there was sometimes failure of implementation due to shortcomings in classroom and task management. This was accompanied by ineffectual task assessment and diagnosis which caused inappropriate follow up intentions. Success appeared to be related not to teacher intentions but to affective characteristics; 'busy work was often equated with appropriate or successful work' (p.74).

In order to improve teaching and learning Bennett and Kell recommend changes in the way reception teachers organise their teaching to become better managers of learning. Like Mortimore et al. (1988) who found that to discuss and explain the purpose of work was an element of successful classrooms, Bennett and Kell suggest the use of advance organisers in order to improve children's understanding of the tasks required of them. They suggest teachers overcome the problem of match, monitoring and diagnosis by less individualisation. They encourage teachers to consider children as 'social beings' rather than 'lone scientists' (Bruner and Harste 1987) and that learning should be seen as a cooperative endeavour.

### Summary of effective teaching

A summary of the findings as to recommended teacher behaviour from the main studies discussed here can be seen in Table One overleaf.

From these studies it becomes evident that the action of the individual teacher is a crucial element in the progress made by the child in reading as in other curriculum

**Recommended teacher behaviour**                      **Research project**

	T1	B1	B2	T2	H	M	O	HM
High level of interaction including opportunities for extended conversation and higher order questioning.	+	+				+	+	+
Good match showing high expectations of ability and interest.	+	+		+				+
Good task design and evaluation including consideration of cognitive outcomes.		+	+					
Good assessment and record keeping.		+	+		+	+		+
Opportunities for cooperative learning.			+	+	+	+		
Feedback with praise and positive attitude					+	+	+	+
Whole school policy.				+	+	+		
Parental involvement.				+	+	+		
Management skills such as advance organisers, routine.		+	+			+	+	
Encouraging active involvement, allowing freedom to make errors and find solutions within a framework.	+	+				+	+	
Relevance and purpose to the task, discussed with and understood by the children.			+	+	+			
Limited focus within sessions.						+		
Range of activities and approaches		+			+			+

<b>Key</b>	T1	Tizard and Hughes (1984)
	B1	Bennett et al. (1984)
	B2	Bennett and Kell (1989)
	T2	Tizard et al. (1988)
	H	Hackney (ILEA, 1988)
	M	Mortimore et al. (1988a)
	O	Oracle (Galton and Simon, 1980)
	HM	HMI surveys in 1980's

**Table One: (from Fisher, 1992 p. 51): Summary of the findings of research into primary classrooms 1980-1989**



areas. Certain indications can be drawn from the studies and a picture of an effective literacy teacher for young children emerges. This is someone who gives a high priority to literacy and provides a variety of literacy experiences for the children. This does not necessarily imply a heavy emphasis on teaching of certain skills but emphasis on the experiences and resources provided for the children. It should be a person who is an effective manager of learning and who designs and matches task to pupil appropriately. The effective teacher will be someone who provides opportunities for interaction about literacy events within the classroom between the children and adults and between the child and his/her peers. He or she will be a teacher who can successfully and effectively monitor the child's progress, plan a suitable programme for that child and provide feedback to him/her about that progress all within a supportive environment. It is also of note that these findings relate more to organisational and interpersonal relationships than to descriptors such as method. To this picture of the effective teacher must be added the concerns of Wells (1987), Tizard et al. (1988) and Wood (1986) etc. who cast doubt on the appropriateness of the classroom context and, most particularly, the opportunities for interaction.

### Methodological Issues

Some methodological issues arise from this review. Many of the studies considered are large scale. Each of them involved a team of research workers. This has the advantage that a lot of cases can be looked at and the findings can be claimed to be generalisable. However, the drawback to this is that in order to design large scale studies a team of researchers have to be briefed. This means that in order to reduce the problem of different interpretations of the same type of behaviour a tight schedule of observations and recording has to be drawn up. This results in

researchers starting from preset categories which will limit what they are able to observe. Also the broad spectrum results in the fact that, in many of the studies cited above, reading is only one aspect of what is being looked at and the schedule of observation will be directed to all aspects of learning rather than specifically at reading. This is not in any way to invalidate the findings but to recognise the nature of these findings and where they fit into a developing understanding of the role of the teacher of early reading.

It is also the case that the conclusions drawn about the efficacy of certain types of teacher behaviour are only as reliable as the measures used. It is generally agreed that there is no totally effective measure of reading ability. Tests that assess mainly word recognition are only effective in judging the effectiveness of children's learning to recognise words. Bennett et al. (1984) use specially designed tests relevant to the classroom tasks being observed and these could be subject to bias of design and assessment. The norm referenced tests that are often used for these studies give some indications of progress in aspects of literacy but they cannot be said to provide the full picture any more than any other form of assessment. HMI judge standards according to their view of national standards and have been criticised for not taking into account local conditions (Reynolds and Cuttance 1992). Also their judgement, whilst being based on a wealth of experience, is as prone to subjectivity as others.

In retrospect, writing this some time after I undertook the main part of the reading described here, I find myself looking at some aspects of this in a new light. The research discussed here has pursued what Willinsky (1990) calls a 'pedagogy of proficiency' (p. 162). While the ultimate goal of research into the teaching of reading must be to improve ways in which teachers achieve success in enabling children to

learn to read, at this stage, my intentions were to find out more about what teachers are doing in order to *analyse and explain* this. The focus in the design of the first part of the study on a methodology that sought to test effectiveness may have predetermined the nature of the findings.

In the next chapter I shall undertake a major examination of issues to do with methodology that are relevant to this project. Despite the limitations that are inherent in any research the overwhelming amount of evidence points to the importance of the teacher in children's learning.

### **Implications for My Own Research**

The research considered above has shown the teacher to be central to children's learning. This does not invalidate the importance of the home background or theories of cognition but adds another dimension to the study of learning which warrants investigation. It has also provided me with some useful indications of factors that can be considered as associated with effective practice and ways of looking at how the teacher is working. However, it also shows that method or programme are incomplete descriptors of teachers' practice. What teachers do is described by HMI (DES 1989) as 'eclectic'. They are shown not to adhere to a particular method but choose from various methods and programmes according to individual style. In addition findings from several of the research studies have established that, when teachers are asked about what they do in the classroom, this is not always supported by observational evidence. This seems to reveal a mismatch between theory and practice. This mismatch is evident on two levels. Firstly, it is seen in teachers' apparent inability to describe accurately what they do and secondly, in the difficulty



expressed by trainee and newly qualified teachers in applying what they have learned about reading to the classroom situation (OFSTED 1993b).

Initial teacher education courses and inservice courses traditionally, and for reasons of practicability, concentrate more on the type of knowledge which relates to how children learn to read and to methods of teaching reading than on the application of these in the classroom. Students have the opportunity to observe teachers teaching reading and to 'practise teaching' themselves. However, it is often the case that the apparent fluency of the classroom situation conceals the strategies employed by the teachers. The teachers themselves do not have the time or the experience to analyse and make explicit these strategies to individual student teachers.

This points to the need to provide a better explanation of what the teacher of early reading does, that is, to provide a way of making explicit what is often implicit. It seems from the research considered above that teachers agree that they do not adhere to a single method but they are not good at explaining what they do do. Or, at least, they are not good at applying researcher's descriptions to their own practice.

The research considered here has had different aims from my own. All the studies cited have contributed to my understanding of the classroom context or to ideas about methodology. More than anything else they have emphasised for me the need to describe and explain what the teacher of initial reading does. This is, firstly, to add to the knowledge that we have about children learning to read by examining that further vital element in a child's formal learning: the teacher. It is, secondly, to place the teacher in a sharper focus than previous studies during the child's first year of school.



The classroom is, however, a complex arena to study. Preset, carefully planned research design does not always sit easily with the complexity of the situation. Doyle (1986) describes the 'multidimensionality, simultaneity, immediacy, unpredictability, publicness and historical embeddedness of the demands upon teachers' (Brown and McIntyre 1993 p.5). Doyle sees the classroom as a place where a vast amount of information is processed. The pace of life is rapid and the many demands made upon teachers come quickly and may often conflict with one another. However, teachers, as all human beings, can only attend to a limited number of things at any one time and therefore they need to be constantly making decisions about how to react.

Woods (1986) describes the skill of the teacher as being able to guess right most of the time. He argues that teaching, because of the nature of classroom life discourages doubt and uncertainty. The pressures of the classroom make it difficult for teachers to reflect on what they are doing while they are doing it. Therefore the decisions made are often based on intuition, but, he argues, it is intuition based on learned knowledge. This knowledge is more than translation of a learned theory but the cumulative experience of practice.

Calderhead (1987) also considered the complexity of the teacher's task. He described teaching as a goal oriented activity with the dilemma for teachers being that there are no clear cut 'clients': society, parents, children etc. Teaching requires skilful action which adapts constantly to the situation. The teacher has to possess a body of specialised knowledge but deals constantly with problems that are complex and ambiguous.

The multidimensional nature of the teaching process and the nature of knowledge required is examined by Schön (1983 & 1987). His work has been most influential in relation to reflecting on practice. He argues that professionals do not depend on applying their general theoretical knowledge to practical situations. He suggests that they rely to a large extent on non-logical thinking and knowledge grounded in experience in their decision making. He calls this 'knowledge in action' (1983) and describes how this knowledge is sometimes inaccessible to professionals themselves; although they can demonstrate it they cannot make it explicit.

'Knowing in action' is used 'to refer to the sort of know-how we reveal in our intelligent action, publicly observable or private, which we reveal by our spontaneous skilful execution of the performance; and are characteristically unable to make explicit' (p.25).

This perhaps goes some way towards explaining why teachers are inconsistent in their descriptions of what they do. It also has implications for research into teaching in that it implies that both observation of teachers and discussion with teachers are important parts of any research study. Teaching is a complex process which for the teachers themselves is usually more implicit than explicit.

Given the complexity of the classroom situation it is hardly surprising that there is a mismatch between the theoretical picture of what should happen in classrooms and the practice of what actually happens on a moment to moment analysis. It has already been established that the teaching and learning of reading has been much studied and analysed. However, these analyses more usually consider method and its relationship to learning than the actual classroom practice of the teacher. Where the classroom practice is examined this usually looks at more than one area of the curriculum and one age group to provide a broad picture. The research also seeks to test

effectiveness, and in so doing requires predefined measures. This may limit the openness of the inquiry and therefore reduce opportunities for a new definition of the teaching of early reading. In addition, much of the research is critical of teachers. It describes what they do wrong rather than trying to explain what they do right.

This study seeks to provide an in depth analysis of a small sample of teachers with the intention of providing a better explanation of practice that can inform the teaching of early reading.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have considered some of the research that has informed my own work. This has shown the importance of the adult in a child's learning. I have also looked at research that has been undertaken into schools and classrooms. This has emphasised the importance of the teacher and it has also provided me with ways of looking at teaching and some evidence of what might be considered effective practice. The question of whether a pre-definition of good practice was helpful at this stage was raised earlier and will be considered further in Chapter Five. The research that has been discussed here has been partly responsible for my interest in the role of the teacher in the initial teaching of reading and has also been influential in how I have gone about my own research.

In the next chapter I shall describe how I designed the two parts of this present study. I shall also discuss the methodology I employed and why I went about it in the way that I did.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

Whereas this chapter is probably the most important in the dissertation, it has been difficult to write up. I did not make the decisions relating to design and methodology in a neat and tidy way. My work is made up of two parts. The design of each part represents where I was in my understanding about research methodology and what I was trying to do at the outset of that part of the research. The movement from the first part into the second part also represents a development in understanding both of the subject of the research and the nature of the research.

My feeling of dissatisfaction with positivist and experimental research as the main way for examining children learning to read has already been recorded in the previous chapters. However, it is not an easy step to take away from early training in research methodology and familiarity with the dominant research paradigm in the field. In retrospect, although I was unaware of it at the time, the design of the first part of the study was influenced by this difficulty. The first part of the study yielded important data that influenced the focus and design of the second part, but it was unsatisfactory in that I succumbed to many of the temptations that I have criticised in others. I was looking for an easy answer too soon, rather than tolerating the messiness inherent in ethnographic data. I made too many early assumptions about what I was looking at. These limited what I was able to find out about what teachers were doing to teach reading.



In writing about the design of the research, I have tried to represent the study as a whole. In the findings and conclusions drawn it undoubtedly does represent a whole piece of research. However, for the reasons described above, some decisions were based on incomplete premises, and my thinking about these modified in the design of the second part. Therefore certain parts of this chapter have to be taken in chronological order to explain how my thinking changed. Also, it is sometimes necessary to make reference to the findings of the first part to explain my reasons for the design of the second part. At each stage I have tried to explain both how certain decisions were made and why.

In order to present this complex picture in a coherent way I shall start by looking at the research study as a whole. First, I shall examine the methodological issues that I had to address at each stage of the research process. Second, I shall describe the selection of cases and units of observation, that is the selection of schools, of teachers, of time spent in observation and selection of the focus of attention for the observation. Then it is necessary to separate the two parts of the study, in order to examine my thinking and the decisions I made at that particular time. For each part I shall explain how I observed and recorded data, and shall attempt to clarify the terms I use to discuss what I did. After this I will go back to the study as a whole and consider some further aspects of the methodology which impact upon the findings and the conclusions I shall be drawing from them. I shall discuss the use of quantitative analysis as part of a qualitative study. I shall consider the ethical questions that have arisen out of the research. I shall finally consider the potential validity and generalisability of the whole piece of research.

### **Methodological Considerations**

In this section I want to look at approaches to research into reading and into classroom practice. I shall do this firstly by considering the mainly experimental approaches to research into reading and quantitative methods used to collect and analyse data both for this and for research into classroom practice. I shall then argue why I have found these approaches unhelpful for the study I wished to undertake here. This is not with the intention of denying the validity of this type of research but to argue that a range of approaches are needed in order to explain the complex relationship between teaching and learning. I shall look at what premise experimental research starts from and argue why this is inappropriate here. I shall also consider what ethnographic approaches offer to this particular study.

The first chapter touched briefly on my own dissatisfaction with much of the research methodology employed in research into the teaching of reading (see pages 15-16). Most research into reading that is disseminated through journals and books is of a positivist nature. That is it takes the *behaviour* of reading and examines and analyses this through experimental and/or quantitative methods. Cohen and Manion (1989) divide approaches to research into positivist and non-positivist, describing the positivist approach as one where the theory precedes the research and the focus is on behaviour. They describe a non-positivist approach as one in which the theory is said to emerge from the data and focuses on the *action*. The former is described as normative in conception and using mainly quantitative techniques of analysis whereas the latter is described as interpretive and using mainly qualitative forms of data analysis.

In the study of reading this adherence to positivist approaches to research tends to lead to experimental methodology in which the reading behaviour is studied in isolation from the context in which it takes place. In fact attempts are made to reduce such variables so that a particular aspect of the reading process can be examined. An example of this would be the extensive use made of subjects reading non-words as indicative of the reading process. Whilst useful indications of how children read may arise from this, as the work in Cambridge (Bryant and Bradley, 1985 and Goswami, 1991), it can only give us part of the picture of how the child learns to read in a busy classroom. Studies discussed in the previous chapter demonstrate the effect of the context on the learner: particularly the differential effect of individual teachers.

Yet recent years have seen a shift from traditional views of literacy as a set of skills to be learned to what Botel, Ripley and Barnes (1993) refer to as 'the new literacy view' where learners are seen to be active constructors of meaning through their transactions with texts and with others. Street (1993) argues that this shift in what constitutes literacy as an object of study has required a shift in how we are to study it.

Whilst a definition of reading that focused mainly on psycholinguistic processes, decoding signs and interacting with text could be studied by experimental methods that investigated individual action, a social approach to reading requires research that can handle social context (p.81).

Furthermore, it is the teacher herself who is expected to implement the findings of research in the classroom. This can be hard to do when the prime actor is not present in the research design and the context is deliberately removed from hurly burly of classroom life. Gibson (1989) states, 'those of us who want to teach must

understand that the educational process is influenced as much by the nature of the social world of the classroom - the 'how' of teaching - as it is by the content of the programme - the 'what' of teaching' (p. 43/4).

One function of the approach to research into reading that focuses on the child's interaction with text is to concentrate attention on the programme or method employed by the teacher. Here the approach to research is based on theories of how children/readers interact with text. However, as stressed by Cook-Gumperz (1986),

learning is not just a matter of cognitive processing in which individuals receive, store and use certain kinds of instructional messages which are organised into a curriculum. Literacy learning takes place in a social environment through interactional exchanges in which what is to be learnt is to some extent a joint construction of teacher and student (p.8).

Research into classroom practice in the last decade has tended to be of a large scale nature employing survey data (as in HMI reports) or rigorously structured observational studies where teacher behaviour is associated with test scores to try to identify successful aspects of classroom practice. Whilst these have yielded some useful indications, most of these have tended to be negative in their criticism of teacher behaviour; for example the rejection of dual queuing (Bennett et al., 1984, Southgate et al. 1981). It is also the case that, with the exception of some of the studies reported in the second chapter, these focus on overall classroom practice and not specifically on reading or literacy. For these reasons the intention here was to look in more detail at the particular case of the teacher of reading in the child's first year of school.



The intention stated above is not intended to deny the validity of much of the research that has already been undertaken into reading and into classroom practice. Indeed, as a practising teacher and researcher myself, my views of the teaching of reading have been influenced by previous research studies. Many of the assumptions underlying my own beliefs have been shaped by research of different kinds. These assumptions are brought with me to the design of my own research and I have tried to explain and justify them above (Chapter One). However, my interest in the action going on in the classroom arose from a feeling that much of what was written about the teaching of reading related to theory rather than practice and this feeling was supported by evidence from HMI who report that most teachers use an 'eclectic' approach and do not adhere to one method over and above another (DES 1989). Thus it was to a qualitative approach to research that I turned to examine the action in the specific case of the teacher of reading in the child's first year of school. Where, in the words of Bloome (1993), 'methodologically, the goal is not the generalisation of decontextualised principles or generalisations at an abstract level but derivation of principles and theoretical insights within particularity' (p.102).

At this point I want to put my own decisions about methodology into context. Some of the difficulties I encountered in the design of the research arose from the existence of a dichotomy between types of research methodology which can sometimes seem to be very clear cut with approaches set in finite opposition to one another. This is often the case in text books on research methodology in which authors try to simplify what is essentially a complex subject. Whilst finite definitions can be useful at an early stage, I found they eventually became counter-productive. It was particularly the case when, on further reading, I found that there was not necessarily agreement between authors as to definitions of different approaches to methodology.

It was only after reading 'What's Wrong with Ethnography' by Martin Hammersley (1992) that I was able to put research design into perspective and look on methodology as a tool rather than a dictator. It was only then that I could consider the place of the case studies that I had used in perspective, and in relation to other research. Up to this point I had tried to fit what I had done into pre-conceived patterns described by other people in a range of other contexts.

Hammersley (1992), in a detailed discussion of the values and shortcomings of an ethnographical approach to research, places the case study in a model of research design that considers the case study as one strategy in the selection of cases amongst others such as survey or experiment. He defines the case study as 'the investigation of a *relatively small number of naturally occurring cases*' (p.185). He argues that there is not a simple dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative method but a range of positions that depend upon the purposes and circumstances of the research. Therefore, in the present case, for the reasons discussed above, experiment was inappropriate and large scale surveys were already available. An ethnographic case study was the means by which I could examine in more detail the teacher's action. It was the best means available for my particular purpose.

This does not imply it is a better method per se but that it was the most appropriate choice here. Indeed, the supposed dichotomy between research paradigms has been counter-productive in research into reading. Different camps have tried to out-argue the other rather than looking at ways in which many forms of research can provide more insights. A problem encountered by ethnographers in relation to research into the teaching of reading where the dominant research paradigm is

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experimental, is that many well established researchers in reading may not respect ethnographic research methods. Stierer (1993) discusses the difficulty of the 'new literacy' to prove itself as the ethnographic approach to research that it adopts is not valued by its critics. Beard (1993a) in a refutation of apprenticeship and emergent approaches to literacy states,

In fact, there are several other uncertainties and questions about the emerging literacy perspective, including the adequacy of the notion itself, its manifestations in how children's skills develop over time and in the ethnographic research approaches which are often used to investigate it (p.190).

Nevertheless the opposing paradigms can work together. This can be seen in an American research study into the home and school factors affecting children's progress in reading. Here two research teams worked closely together with the same population but using different methodology. Chall, Jacobs and Baldwin (1991) employed quantitative methodology while Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill (1991) used a mainly ethnographic approach. However, the two teams reached broadly the same findings.

Having chosen an ethnographic case study approach as the most appropriate method for this project, it was important that I considered the best way to go about it to ensure validity. Hammersley (1992) proposes two important aspects of the choice of an ethnographic study to ensure it reveals more than 'everyday knowledge'. He states that the distinctiveness of ethnographic descriptions 'should lie in the explicitness and coherence of the models employed and the rigour of the analysis.' (p.28). Indeed, Cohen and Mannion (1989) identify the self corrective function of research as that which places it beyond experience in its attempt to explain. In particular ethnographic research should be judged according to the criteria of validity and relevance. In other words, the claim made should be as truthful as



possible given the selective representation of reality presented. There are multiple, non-contradictory and valid descriptions and explanations of the same phenomena and the aim of social research is to represent reality not to reproduce it. Representation will always come from some point of view and ethnographers will interpret evidence according to their own assumptions and inferences, 'as researchers we must develop ways in which we monitor our assumptions and inferences we make on the basis of them.' (Hammersley 1992 p. 53).

Secondly Hammersley proposes relevance as an important criterion by which ethnographic research should be judged, that is the importance of the research topic and the contribution to the collective of knowledge about the subject. He also discusses the 'trade-offs' necessary in the selection of a case study as methodology over some quantitative approaches. In the case of selecting a case study rather than a survey he defines the 'trade-off' as greater detail and accuracy about a small number as opposed to making effective generalisations to a larger population. Also, although in a case study approach there is no control of the variables such as there is in an experiment, the subjects are less likely to be influenced by the research as researchers work in as natural settings as possible. Indeed, in the present study, the whole purpose was to look at the naturalistic context because of a concern that existing research took too little or no account of this.

There is further discussion about the validity of this particular study at the end of the chapter. First I want to consider how I tried to ensure explicitness, coherence and rigour of analysis.



### **Selection**

My intention in this study was to look at what teachers of early literacy did in the classroom. This was in the belief that what they do influences children's learning and is not strictly related to method or programme. I was wanting to explain their actions and to provide a better model of practice than the one offered by the notion of 'methods' for teaching reading.

Initially, the intention was to follow up studies that showed that children learn the skills that are emphasised by the approach used (Barr 1972, Guthrie 1973) and to look at this in relation to the 'real books' versus reading scheme debate that was going on in the eighties. However, it soon became clear that this was not going to be a worthwhile avenue to explore. The reasons for this were that, firstly, the large differences between the children on starting school meant that anything other than tentative suggestions would be inappropriate and would not add anything to previous research. The second factor was that, as the period of the study went on it became clear that the way I had described the teachers' approach to teaching reading was inadequate. Not only were there many similarities in their practice, but also this evolved over the observation period with the initial distinctions becoming even more blurred. Although the first factor (the differences between children's experience) had been recognised beforehand, the second had not been foreseen and this meant that even tentative indications would be invalid. The main motivation for the study had been to consider the teacher herself and there was found to be enough of interest in a focus on the *teacher* without attempting to reveal any relationship between what the teacher was doing and what children were learning. Before this type of study would be worthwhile it was felt to be necessary to develop a model of teaching that better

represented what teachers do than the oversimplistic use of 'method' to describe their practice.

For these reasons only the data relating to the teachers will be discussed here. Some of the findings relating to the children are reported in Fisher (1994) but are not of relevance to the focus of this study as it has evolved.

### Selection of teachers

In the first part of the study I decided to look at four teachers. Four were chosen as this provided for the differences (between teachers using 'Real Books' and those using schemes) that I had originally wanted to examine in relation to children's learning. In the second part, two teachers were observed. How and why certain teachers are selected for research is a matter of some concern to researchers.

When selecting teachers to be studied, some research into teaching has attempted to identify effective teachers using the criteria of pupil scores on tests (e.g. Morine and Vallance 1975) or pupil behaviour as evidenced by pupil involvement and low levels of disruption (e.g. Doyle 1977a). Neither of these criteria would be helpful with teachers of the youngest children in school since test scores are for the most part unavailable or, if they were available, would relate more to the home background than to the school at that stage in a child's schooling. Even those results that are available from National Curriculum assessment at the end of Key Stage One would usually relate to more than one teacher. Similarly classroom disruption is not necessarily unusual with four and five year olds and, while Doyle also considered levels of pupil involvement, this is equally unreliable with young children just starting school and could give more indication about their pre-school experience



than the effectiveness of their teacher. Another disadvantage of looking for 'effective' teachers was that, in order to narrow down the choice in this area where judgements have to be largely subjective and related to preconceived notions about what a good teacher is, I could have been directed to exceptional rather than representative practice.

Smith (1991) discusses the difference between 'good practice' and 'common practice'. She defines good practice as 'practice which has varying degrees of excellence' and common practice as 'practice which is typically displayed by most teachers most of the time' (p.112). She goes on to argue that a central assumption of the concept of good practice is that it is something that can exist independently of the individual teacher. This in itself is problematic and unproven. Another problem with the identification of good practice is that this implies that there is already a preconceived notion of what good practice is. At this stage in this particular study such a view was not appropriate in that the study was intended to try to identify and explain aspects of practice.

Brown and McIntyre (1993) wanted to select 'good teachers' but did not want to undertake any form of evaluation since this would have implied that they already had criteria in mind for judging teaching. In order to overcome this they asked pupils to describe the strengths of any of their recent teachers. This was not felt to be relevant for the youngest children as the criteria that might be used by the youngest children either at the time or in retrospect would not necessarily be appropriate for judging teachers of reading. One of the main reasons for this is that, at that time, children may have had no other experience of teachers upon which to base their judgements.

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In order to identify schools that might be appropriate, I approached the Local Education Authority Advisory Service and colleagues in Higher Education. I was concerned to select teachers who could be said to be representative of the first teacher in a child's schooling and who were generally considered successful. It must be acknowledged that this can only be a subjective view in that the whole notion of 'good practice' is problematic although the term is widely used. When used in this context it is taken as similar to that used by HMI and discussed in the previous chapter. The teachers chosen could be described as generally well thought of by both LEA and colleagues in Higher Education, but were not chosen as being in any way exceptional. In fact one teacher was rejected from the study as being too idiosyncratic although widely accepted as a successful teacher of literacy. By exceptional I mean as seen through the eyes of colleagues. Although all the teachers were well thought of by colleagues and others, the one who was rejected was described as excellent but unusual. The teachers observed had already had at least four years experience as infant teachers. Many studies into teachers' thinking have focused on teachers in training, for example, Doyle (1975b) and Calderhead (1981). This, while providing a ready source of teachers accustomed to being observed would not have provided data about what the experienced teacher has learned to do through experience as well as theoretical knowledge.

For the first part of the study I had decided to identify teachers who appeared to use different approaches so that any similarities or differences could be examined. Four schools were chosen after preliminary interviews with the headteachers in order to find how the schools described their approaches to the teaching of reading. Two further schools were identified for the second part from the same initial group of



schools. The intention, for the first part, was to identify two schools that used a reading scheme and two that had a non-hierarchical approach to reading in which children are allowed to choose their own reading books rather than being guided by a reading programme of some sort. In the second part of the study two schools were identified that were not known for a strict adherence to one method or another.

### Selection of schools in the first study and initial access

All schools are in the same shire county and located in towns of medium to large size. Three were on sites where there was a mixture of new and old buildings and one was of recently built open-plan design. The catchment areas contained a mixture of private and rented housing. There was a similar amount of unemployment which followed the county average, this is affected by seasonal work on the land and in the tourist industry.

The term 'Real Books' was used by one of the schools in the first study. However, the term itself is not thought to be helpful because of the associated media hysteria. Various descriptions have been used for a reading method that allows children free choice of reading book and regulates the expectations that the adult who reads with the child has of the way in which the child interacts with the print. The main difference between this method and one that follows one or more published reading scheme lies in the choice that the child has and the power and sense of ownership invested in the child as opposed to the power of the teacher or publisher to regulate the child's reading. Donaldson (1989) describes those who advocate the 'Real Books' or 'Apprenticeship Approach' to the teaching of reading as belonging to 'the minimal teaching movement'. The hypothesis at the start of this study was that this was not the case. Teachers employ various levels of intervention in their teaching but it was

not considered that this was related to the reading programme they employed but their own personal philosophy about the teaching of reading. It seemed possible that 'minimal teaching' could be found within any approach to the teaching of reading.

After an initial introduction by the headteacher, the teachers were approached and, after an explanation of what the project involved, were given a chance to opt out if they wished. In each case the teachers were willing to be involved. At the end of the first term's observations the decision was taken to discontinue the study in one of the classes as the teacher had changed and the class was being taken much of the time by a trainee (PGCE articulated) teacher. It was therefore felt to be inappropriate to continue to use this school.

For the purposes of this study the names of both teachers and schools have been changed to assure their anonymity. In choosing pseudonyms I have tried to opt for names that did not carry with them any implied status and ones that sounded like English names. For the teachers I have used the usual Mrs or Miss with a common surname. Delamont (1992) criticises researchers who do not choose neutral names when these would be appropriate. She cites school names that are obviously rural or urban such as Greenhill and Downtown or 'Fulfilling Prophets High School' to disguise a Jewish school (Riseborough 1988). Although names such as Roadville and Trackton (Heath 1983) have become immortalised, they were deliberately chosen to depict the community they described. I have called all my schools primary schools, although one was in fact a combined school. This did not seem to be relevant in relation to the first class in the school and naming it as a combined school would have made identification easier.



*Redgate Primary School.* This is a large school catering for children from a sizable estate on the outskirts of a small city. The houses are built closely together and are both rented and privately owned. There were four parallel reception/year one classes which took in new children at the start of each term. The approach to the teaching of reading centred around free choice of books together with a fair degree of intervention on the part of the teacher. Children had book bags in which they kept two, three or four books usually of their own choice. They were encouraged to take these books home each night and they had a small exercise book that accompanied them. This recorded the titles of the book, the expectations the parents should have of their child's reading of the books (graded A, B, or C), and a space for teacher or parent comments. Children chose from picture books, information books and books from certain recently published reading schemes such as Story Chest. Miss Morrison was an experienced teacher, year co-ordinator and had been in that school for four years at the start of the study.

*Belle View Primary School.* Belle View Primary School is situated on the edge of a medium sized town surrounded by a modern housing estate containing both privately owned and rented houses. There are other schools within walking distance of the estate and parents choose which school to send their children to according to preference. The school is of open plan design with plenty of space due to falling rolls in the infant department. This was a large open area which held the two infant classes. The school had abandoned all use of reading schemes several years ago and had developed its own approach to the teaching of literacy. The children had a free choice of books which they were encouraged to take home in book bags. Miss Howe was a young teacher who had been teaching this age group for four years at the time of the study. The observations were not continued in this school after the first term.

*Granville Road Primary School.* Granville Road Primary School is situated in the centre of a medium sized town surrounded by pre-war housing which is both privately owned and rented. The school is one of the oldest in the town and had only a small playground in relation to the number of children using it. A new entrance hall and reception area had been built two years before which joined the infant and junior departments. There were two parallel reception/year one classes which were in adjoining classrooms. The infant department had updated its reading resources a few years ago and used a mixture of schemes, predominantly The Oxford Reading Tree. Mrs Somerton was an experienced teacher who had been in that school for six years.

*Yelland Primary School.* Yelland Primary School is situated on the edge of a medium sized town. The school was housed on two sites. The two reception/year one classes were in what used to be the old school and children walked or were bussed 400 yds to the main school for lunch, PE and music. A building programme which would allow the whole school to be contained on one site started in the summer term 1991. Both reception/year one classes were in the old school house which had one large classroom and one small one. Both classes held registration groups in the large classroom and took it in turns to use the smaller of the two classrooms. The school used a variety of reading schemes, predominantly One, Two, Three and Away. Children were encouraged to take reading books home. Mrs Gilbertson was an experienced teacher who had been in the school three years.

### Selection of schools in the second study and initial access

The two schools were different in catchment areas in that one was a village school serving a widespread rural area to which the children were bused each morning. The



second school was in a nearby market town on a large estate with mainly rented housing. Both schools had their share of social problems, although the village school had a higher proportion of middle class children.

*Billington Primary School.* The village school had five classes and had recently undergone reorganisation from a first school to a primary school and had had a new headteacher appointed. There were good relationships with the local community. However, the widespread nature of the community and the fact that most children were bused to school meant that there was not the usual meeting between parents and teacher at the end of the school day. This also meant that children starting school had to come in for a full day right from the very beginning.

The class at the beginning of the summer term 1993 had twenty five children, seven of whom had just started school that term, a further seven who had started after Christmas and eleven who were in their third term in school. There was one child who had behavioural problems. There was a classroom assistant on some days and often a parent who would help with hearing children read.

Several reading schemes were in use in the classroom and children chose their next book from ones in the same band as identified by letters that were printed in the back of the book. They were encouraged to take these books home at night. Mrs Harris, the teacher, used Letterland in conjunction with handwriting and the introduction of initial sounds. She explained, 'I'm not into the whole thing at all ..... I use it just for the initial sounds and I do find it helpful for that. I don't always read the story but we talk about the names' (Interview 20.5.93).

First impressions were of a happy, quietly ordered classroom with attractive, interactive displays and children who were willing to talk to visitors. A new classroom was in the process of being built outside the reception class and the building site gave rise to much discussion and interest. Displayed on the window sill were books about diggers and building and there were paintings on the walls that had been done with different types of mud from the site.

*Coverland Primary School.* The school had eight classes and a nursery unit. It had also recently undergone reorganisation with a 5 - 9 first school merging with the neighbouring 9 - 13 middle school to form a primary school on the site of the middle school. A static population on the housing estate had caused there to be some fall in numbers in recent years. A new headteacher had been appointed at the time of reorganisation. Mrs Devlin was the deputy headteacher of the school and had also been appointed to the school at the time of reorganisation. Parents brought children to and from school and met them outside the classroom at the beginning and end of sessions. They were also welcome to come into the classroom to speak to the teacher, change reading books, look for lost property and so on.

The class at the beginning of the summer term 1993 had twenty seven children, eleven of whom had started school that term. The new children started in the second week of the term and came in for half days until it was felt they were ready to stay for the full day. There was a full time classroom assistant who worked mostly with groups.

The teacher used mainly the Oxford Reading Tree but children were allowed to choose books from within a range. They watched the television programme 'Words and

Pictures' which was followed up with work on initial sounds. First impressions were of a happy lively classroom with a lot of emphasis on play in the early stages. There was a reading corner and a special chair in which children were encouraged to read.

Both school days were organised in a similar way, starting with registration which sometimes was followed by a whole school assembly. The mornings and afternoons followed a similar pattern with children working in groups on set tasks on their own, with the teacher or with a classroom assistant or parent. Children were allowed to choose when they had finished the set work.

Initial access was gained by approaching the headteacher and then talking to teachers. I explained to both heads and classroom teachers what the research was about and what involvement would entail. Both teachers were interested in the idea of the project and one accepted immediately. Mrs Harris was reluctant at first at the thought of the close scrutiny involved. She agreed to an initial visit and after that said she was happy to continue.

### **Observation**

#### Time spent in observation

In the first part of the study the observations extended over a whole year, and in the second over one term. However, the amount of data collected was similar in both studies. The reason for this was that some of the data collected in the first part related to the children and is not considered here. Also, the observations in the second study were more intensive over a shorter period of time.



In the summer term of 1991 five half days were spent in each of the four classrooms observing the teachers. Three whole days were then spent observing the remaining three schools in the spring term of 1992. Five half days were spent in each of the schools in the second part of the study and were followed, on the same day, by interviews with those teachers (See Table Two). The amount of time spent in observation of the teachers was determined by the need to experience a range of activities, both morning and afternoon and on different days of the week. Although decisions about the number of visits were influenced by the amount of time available for the research project, sufficient time was spent for patterns to emerge across a variety of contexts.

	Summer 1991	Spring 1992	Summer 1993
Redgate	5 half days	3 full days	
Belle View	5 half days	-	
Granville	5 half days	3 full days	
Yelland	5 half days	3 full days	
Bickington			5 half days
Coverland			5 half days

**Table Two: Time spent in observation**

Evertson and Green (1986) emphasise the importance of the historical context of the events observed. This was an important issue in the study of teachers of children in their first year of school. The Local Education Authority within which the study took place had the policy of taking in new children each term during the year. Therefore it could be argued that in the autumn term, with a small class of mostly newcomers to school, practice could be different from later in the year when the new



children are part of a larger class and come into an established class group. The data used in both parts of the study were collected in the second half of the spring term and first part of the summer term.

### Focus of attention

In each case the focus of my attention was the teacher. I was concerned with occasions when the teacher was engaged in any interaction with a child or children that related to literacy. I have explained above that I felt that, although the subject of the study was *reading*, this examination of the teaching of reading should include all aspects of literacy as what the child learns about the interpretation of text cannot be separated from the production of text.

This in itself presented a problem in that what I was looking at was my interpretation of what constituted literacy. This would not necessarily be what the teacher judged to be related to literacy, nor what the children took as being related to literacy. It is not within the scope or purpose of this study to consider which aspects of the teachers' action the children judged to relate to literacy. However, I did try to overcome some of the potential limitations in my subjective judgement by discussion with the teachers. In the first part of the study I asked teachers at the beginning of the morning or afternoon what activities they saw as being related to literacy. In the second part I had the opportunity to discuss the session with the teachers afterwards so I was able to check my judgements.

### **Design of the First Part of the Study**

The way I went about the first part of this study demonstrates the lack of confidence that I felt initially with a qualitative approach to research. Although I started with

an open agenda for observation in school, I feel, in retrospect, that I moved too quickly into structured observation. This structure influenced what I observed and ultimately limited what I found out.

Glaser and Strauss (1968) describe the way in which sociological research should not be based on a preconceived theoretical framework but that the process of data collection is 'controlled by the emerging theory' (p.45). Thus my initial design was to spend time observing the teachers in action before making decisions about the focus of my observations. However, my preconceived notions about research and the influence of previous studies into classroom practice oriented the study in what I now perceive to be a too prescriptive way for my purposes in this study.

### Observation and recording

In the summer term of 1991 five half days were spent in each of the four classrooms observing the teachers. Field notes were kept of these observations and these recorded what the children were asked to do and what the teacher did. This was in relation to both the allocation of tasks and what the teacher was doing while the children were occupied with their assigned tasks. In the later observations more general comments were recorded, for example, 'Mrs G. mostly walks around the room involving herself with all working groups - or hears readers.' (Field notes, Yelland 10.6.91). Alternatively remarks about certain aspects of the teacher's behaviour were kept, for example, while observing Miss Howe working with children who were writing their own sentences 'no attempt made to correct letter formation' (Field notes, Belle View 13.6.91).



As a result of these observations an observation schedule was set up for use in the autumn and spring terms and a questionnaire and interview schedule for use in the spring or summer terms. Due to unforeseen circumstances it was not possible to continue the research in the classrooms in the autumn term. This meant that an important part of the class' year had gone by unobserved. Despite this it was not considered appropriate to restart the study since the preliminary observations had been made of the teachers at work and these would remain valid inasmuch as they gave indications of how to undertake the next part of the study.

More seriously, two of the schools had reorganised their classes at Key Stage One. Belle View school, who had just appointed a new headteacher, was undergoing changes in policy for the teaching of literacy. Not only this but the new class teacher worked closely with a trainee PGCE articulated teacher who was doing much of the teaching in the spring and summer terms. For this reason it was felt that Belle View should no longer be used for close observation. Although staffing had changed at Redgate, the new teacher Mrs Corby worked closely with Miss Morrison and followed largely similar practice. For these reasons it was not thought to be necessary to exclude Redgate from the study.

The preliminary observations in the four classrooms had shown many similarities in the organisation of the literacy learning but also some difference in the amount of time spent by the teachers in different aspects of their role, the expectations they had of children, the way aspects of literacy were prioritised and the nature of the literacy environment in the classroom. I felt these initial impressions needed to be focused more clearly and a structured system of observation developed to allow the researcher to judge these similarities and differences more precisely.

Research described above has shown that the effective teacher of literacy in the early years should give a high priority to reading and writing and provide a wide range of experiences for children to both use literacy and to see it used. The teacher should also be an effective manager of the classroom situation, providing opportunities for interaction and appropriately designed and matched tasks for the children. He/she should also monitor progress in order to plan a suitable programme and give feedback to the learner. This research is summarised in Table One p.55.

In order to study the work of the three remaining teachers the categories from this summary of research were considered together with the evidence gleaned from the initial observations. These measures were used as they were readily available from much larger teams of researchers over a much broader area than that adopted here. In retrospect, the problem here was that these observational procedures were based mainly in existing theoretical constructs about the nature of teaching. This limited the findings so that they lie mainly within these preexisting theoretical constructs.

At the time the study was undertaken it was not considered appropriate or indeed possible to examine each of the factors mentioned in the research. Therefore certain factors were identified as being most frequently observed. Firstly the instance of each category from Table One on page 55 was counted and only those identified by at least three of the five studies of infant classrooms ( Bennett et al. 1984, Bennett and Kell 1989, Tizard et al. 1988, ILEA 1988 and HMI surveys) were chosen. These were: good match showing high expectations of ability and interest, good assessment and record keeping, opportunities for cooperative learning, relevance



and purpose of the task discussed with and understood by the children and the use of a range of activities and approaches.

Following the initial unstructured observations of the teachers, two factors did emerge which appeared to be very different in the ways in which the teachers organised their time. The first of these was the amount of planned intervention undertaken in the children's learning. Miss Morrison and Miss Howe both planned several sessions in the week where they took groups of children and instructed them in certain aspects of literacy, for example spelling or sentence structure. This confirmed my earlier hypothesis that the description of a 'Real Books' approach as implying minimal teaching (Donaldson 1989) was not necessarily an accurate one. On the other hand Mrs Somerton and Mrs Gilbertson allocated tasks and monitored the children's work on an individual basis. There was also an apparent difference in the range of literacy activity undertaken and the time spent on this. Therefore it was decided also to study the planned intervention undertaken by the teacher and the amount of time and range of literacy activities experienced by the children.

In addition, the kind of tasks given to children varied. There was evidence of some teachers showing more concern for the cognitive outcomes of tasks than other teachers. This relates to the findings of Bennett et al. (1984) and Bennett and Kell (1989). There was also a difference in style of tasks with some teachers using a majority of closed tasks and others encouraging negotiated outcomes. These two extra aspects were added to the task analysis.

In order to decide upon the best way to examine these various factors, they were broken down into observable teacher behaviour and ways of gathering evidence were considered. This process is summarised below in Table Three.

<b>Teacher Behaviour</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Expectations	Task analysis
Match	Task analysis
Consideration of cognitive outcomes	Task analysis
Assessment and record keeping	Questionnaire
Opportunities for cooperative learning	Task analysis
Relevance/purpose of task	Task analysis
Range of literacy opportunities	Task analysis
Planned teacher intervention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- phonics</li> <li>- spelling</li> <li>- handwriting</li> <li>- reading conventions</li> <li>- writing conventions</li> <li>- other</li> </ul>	Teacher observation

**Table Three: Means of gathering evidence of teacher behaviour**

In addition to the structured observation a questionnaire was sent to all five teachers who had been involved. An interview was also to be held with the three remaining teachers in order to clarify and extend understandings gained from the observation. Thus four means of gathering evidence were to be used.

i) *Questionnaire* - to find out from the teachers basic information about classroom policy and how they see their own practice. Prior to use with the teachers in the study, this questionnaire was tried out on a reception/year one teacher who was not

involved in the study and certain changes made to make it more comprehensible to the teachers. See Appendix One.

ii) *Task analysis.* All tasks given to children that contained some element of literacy were analysed. The tasks were to be analysed at a group level to determine the nature of the cognitive outcome, opportunities for cooperative learning, whether the task was within the child's experience, had an outcome other than for the teacher and whether that outcome was negotiable. At an individual level good match and expectations were judged according to the analysis used by Bennett et al. (1984) in which the nature of the task demand (incremental, restructuring, enrichment, practice or revision) was judged. This was done by Bennett's research team through an examination of the product, observation of the process and selected post task interviews. It was not intended in this study to undertake post task interviews due to lack of time. However, by observing the children while they were working and looking at the completed pieces of work, it was possible to make tentative judgements about the level of task demand and match for each child. Conclusions drawn will inevitably be less accurate than those arrived at by a dedicated research team, although there can be discrepancies between researchers' opinions. Given the focus of this study on the role of the teacher, it was considered that this way of judging task demand was appropriate for the purpose of analysing what the teacher is doing in early literacy teaching. See Appendix Two for an example of the observation schedules used to record these observations.

iii) *Observation of the teacher.*

The teacher was observed throughout the day and the changing role adopted by her was recorded. Various roles were considered to be significant: supervisor, monitor,



manager, facilitator, model, instructor, assessor. These have been extended from those discussed above and in Fisher (1992), following the initial observations of the teachers. These records were kept by noting the time when the teacher changed role and calculating the time spent in each role after the observation period. It was sometimes possible to allocate a role to the teacher at the time of the observation and sometimes necessary to fill in roles afterwards from my field notes. A breakdown of the roles adopted by the teacher during the day and where these related to the teaching of literacy would enable analysis of how these teachers used their time.

All instances of planned teacher intervention were observed and recorded, noting the number of children, content and duration. This involved noting each time that the teacher instructed either a group or the whole class on any aspect of learning. These interventions would not be those that arose from a chance comment but ones that had been *planned* by the teacher. The teachers did not always write detailed plans of their days and those they did write usually referred to the children's activity rather than to the teacher's intentions. I had therefore to make a subjective judgment as to whether the intervention was planned. I judged an intervention to be planned when it was longer than one minute and took place, usually at the beginning of a session, with the teacher requiring the attention of specific children. I also included hearing individual children read in this category, when the teacher's full attention was given to this.

The teachers were observed throughout the observation sessions, regardless of curriculum area. Planned teacher intervention in all curriculum areas was recorded because it had been observed that some teachers rarely used any planned instruction in the area of literacy learning. The recording of all instances of planned



teacher intervention, I hoped, would enable me to judge whether this was a factor that was only of relevance to the teaching of literacy or to other curriculum areas as well. Also I had noticed that, where it did occur, it was sometimes no more than a few minutes in duration. For examples of the schedules for recording these observations see Appendix Three.

iv) *Interview.* The interview with the teacher was to extend the understanding of how the teachers saw their role as a teacher of reading. It served as a means of triangulation to check on my observations. In this context the interview served an informative function for the researcher to confirm and extend data already gathered.

### Clarification of terms

It became necessary to identify very clearly what was meant by each of the terms used in the observation and analysis. Even though there was only one researcher involved, decisions had to be made quickly in the classroom while the observation was underway and it was important that there was parity between the different days and activities. Thus the following definitions were arrived at:

*Task.* Task referred to an activity planned by the teacher in which there was some major element of literacy. A major element would be identified as an activity that might be included in the Programmes of Study for the National Curriculum for English (DES 1990a). For example, reading a mathematics worksheet would not be counted whereas writing up a science experiment would.

*Group.* This indicated each group in operation within the classroom at a given time. This could be the whole class group, or a group of two or three

children. No occasion was encountered where one individual child was given a task that no-one else was doing.

Various teacher roles emerged from the initial observations and these were categorised as follows.

*Supervisor* - overseeing the work of the whole class, being concerned with non-cognitive behaviour, attention, register etc.

*Facilitator* - enabling discussion, getting children to review their work participating in activities where modelling was not intended.

*Monitor* - where the teacher was overseeing the children's work and was concerned with the cognitive aspects as opposed to the role of supervisor.

*Manager* - where the teacher was concerned with the organisation of the learning as opposed to direct instruction; e.g. giving instructions, explanations, allocating tasks.

*Model* - reading or writing with children watching or listening.

*Instructor* - instructing a specific point and hearing readers (where full attention is given to this). Whilst it is difficult for the teacher of very young children to ignore the rest of the class, the teacher was considered to be instructing a group of children when this was her main intention and focus.

*Assessor* - this role is subsumed into many of the activities undertaken by the teacher but recorded for the purposes of this study when the teacher was engaged in an activity specifically for assessment purposes.

The collection of data from the first part of the study extended over four terms. Analysis of the initial observations was undertaken during the summer vacation of 1991 and analysis of the second set of data as well as revisiting the initial observations occurred during the summer vacation of 1992. The analysis and my reflections on this led me to feel that further inquiry was needed to fulfil the intentions of the study.

### **Design of the Second Part of the Study**

The findings from the first part of the study led me to question what I had been doing. It became apparent to me that my earnestness of endeavour to produce a neat research study had made my own intentions in the research subordinate to a view of what research should be. I have only myself to blame for this. Maybe years of research within a regime which gave high priority to statistical significance followed by further years of tutoring students to undertake small scale research within tight criteria for assessment had taken their toll. My initial feelings about the importance of the context and that I should not be dictated to by preconceived definitions of classroom practice were still there. However, the initial study had highlighted some important points and confirmed some initial impressions. In particular these related to three points.

Firstly, I did not really feel that I had used qualitative methodology to its full potential. The use of structured observation guided my findings towards a particular model of teaching rather than allowing findings to emerge from the data. It is, of course, impossible to come to any research with a completely open mind. The very act of identifying an area upon which to focus creates a frame of reference which in turn gives rise to different explanations. The ways in which phenomena are



described lead to different interpretations and a different representation of reality. Whilst an attempt may be made to arrive at a neutral explanation of what is happening in the classroom, this cannot be possible. My intentions here were to explain practice in a new way and, yet, I adopted procedures that were rooted in previous explanations of classroom practice.

Secondly, despite my conviction that teaching is a complex process I did not involve the teachers themselves in the research as much as I could have. Indeed earlier research (Bennett 1976) and confirmation from my interviews with teachers in the first study demonstrated a mismatch between what observations appear to show teachers doing in the classroom and what they say about what they do.

Thirdly, observation revealed that most of each of the teachers' time was spent in one or two roles. It had also shown that these roles were not those that had been observed most closely through the structured observation. Therefore further work was needed in classrooms.

These three points led me to consider a form of ethnographic research in which what subjects say about what they do is considered alongside observation. Hammersley (1984) questions the naturalistic philosophy often adopted by ethnographers in which they imply that simply by being in a setting they can understand what is going on there. This is what I had tried to do in the first part of the study and Hammersley reflects one of the reasons why I felt dissatisfied with what I had done. I did not feel I had moved much further forward in understanding the teacher of early reading.

An approach to ethnographic research, termed by Harré and Secord (1972) as 'ethogenic', involves the subjects of the research in the research process. Certain 'episodes' are examined and the subjects' own accounts of what happened are analysed. In this way observation by the researcher and the subjects' explanations of what was observed are taken together. This focuses the research on the process rather than the product. Many of the studies discussed in Chapter Two examine the relationship between the approach to teaching and the product. In the second part of this study, my intention was to examine the process of teaching reading rather than the frequency and type of task used by the teachers.

In order to understand this process I needed to consider the explanations that teachers gave about why they acted in certain ways, rather than only my own explanation. Harré and Secord (1972) advocate the treating of people for scientific purposes *as if they were human beings*. In other words researchers need to take note of the accounts of their actions given by subjects rather than treating them merely as objects to be studied.

It is through reports of feelings, plans, intentions, beliefs, reasons and so on that the meanings of social behaviour and the rules underlying social action can be discovered (p.7).

The term ethogeny is coined from two words: ethology (the study of animals in their natural habitat) and the genesis of human action in the plans and intentions of the agents. The concept of the 'episode' as a unit of analysis involves examination, not only of the overt behaviour, but the thoughts, feelings, intentions and plans etc. of the participants' (p.147).



In the first part of the study I had used deductively derived units of observation as well as preset categories. Although this system could be described as descriptive and not as closed as a pure category system with checklists, rating scales etc., it served as a focus for my analysis of teacher behaviour and relied on previously published research data to identify the areas of observation. For this second part of the study a more open system without preset categories was required. I wanted to identify generic principles and patterns of behaviour in this particular instance of the early teaching of reading.

Some research into teachers' thinking about their teaching is based on simulations and laboratory work rather than actual classroom contexts. Of the systems that involve the teachers commenting on real situations I opted to use stimulated recall in favour of systems where the teacher is recorded 'thinking aloud' during an aspect of her work or keeps a journal. These latter two have been more used for aspects of work such as planning and did not seem suitable for the immediacy and spontaneity of the infant classroom. The use of stimulated recall enabled me to observe what happened in the classroom and then analyse this in relation to what the teacher said about it later.

The first part had identified clearly a whole chunk of 'teaching time' in which the teacher is not instructing nor assessing but working around the classroom on an one-to-one basis. This, together with the whole class story and discussion time, was shown to take up far more of the school day than any activity which might with older children be described as 'the teaching of reading' involving predetermined input from the teacher. These then were the areas I wished to investigate further. I wanted to find out from the teachers themselves what they were trying to do during



this time. I wanted to talk to them about their thoughts about the sessions I had just observed. In order to do this it was necessary to start with a blank page, in so far as this is possible, and allow the descriptions and explanations to emerge from the setting.

### Observation and recording

It was important in this part of the study to gain the confidence of teachers so that they would work normally and talk freely. I wanted, as a researcher, to be seen as a sympathetic part of the situation. This indeed is the essence of ethnographic research where the researcher becomes a part of the scene of the research, living and working among and as a part of the group to be studied.

Having been myself for many years an infant teacher enabled me to 'speak the language' and to participate in the classroom life at times when I was not involved in observing and recording. This went some way to gaining the confidence of the teachers (and the children who at this early age are not satisfied unless they can fit any classroom visitor into a recognised category of adult). However, merely gaining confidence does not ensure a representative selection of practice. In fact, the more the teacher knows the researcher the more there is the likelihood that she will try to act in a way that she judges to be what the researcher would like to see. In response to this potential criticism Bennett et al. (1984) justified their sample of observations by arguing that teachers would only do that which they perceived to be their best practice. Therefore what was observed might be *more* than would have been usual but would not be significantly *different* from their usual practice. I also felt this to be the case with the teachers with whom I was working. In addition, I

included questions in the post observation interviews about the effect of my presence to try to ascertain or attempt to limit the extent of this.

I would call my position in the classroom one of passive participant observer. In my efforts to be accepted by both children and teacher I was participant in the life of the classroom, talking with children and helping out with social events (e.g. changing for PE etc.). However, I was not involved with the actual work in the classroom or provision of activities. I felt I was justified in this approach in that, as a non-participant observer, the very unfamiliarity of this type of adult behaviour for young children would have had more influence on their (and consequently the teacher's) behaviour than the stance I adopted. Furthermore Grant (1991), whilst asserting that non participant observation is successful in constructing meaning in cases where the researcher and teacher share cultures, demonstrates how this can, even so, lead to misunderstandings. Grant, in her desire not to intrude or disrupt the teacher's out of class time, found that this gave rise to misinterpretations by the teacher and perceptions that the researcher was not interested in her view. In the end, Grant regretted her non participant role. My role was one of a participant in the life of the classroom during my visits, although this participation was passive in nature while the teacher was engaged in interactions related to literacy. In addition, the interviews with the teachers at the end of the sessions gave me the opportunity to verify and validate my observations and to keep open a channel of communication with the teachers.

This kind of research, where the researcher is trying to understand and explain aspects of classroom life, involves him or her in entering the life of the classroom as an accepted colleague. This requires the researcher to share in the culture of the



context but it also requires him or her to retain a measure of objectivity in order to analyse what is seen without importing too much of his or her own preconceptions. For this reason I decided to record my classroom observations while they were happening rather than at a later time. I felt this would limit the affect of my own interpretation of events. The use of audio and video tape was considered but rejected due, again, to the unfamiliarity of these for the children. Also the teachers expressed the opinion that they would be considerably inhibited by either the use of a video recorder or the presence of a personal microphone as required to ensure good reproduction by audio and video recorders in a busy classroom.

I decided to keep narrative records of the classroom observations in which the action is described as it happens in chronological order without any preset categories. Evertson and Green (1986) describe ways of making narrative records of observations. They identify three types of narrative records made during observation: critical incident records, specimen descriptions, and field notes. The type of narrative record kept in itself implies assumptions about the setting. Field notes are described as the most general type of record and the form most commonly used in participant observation. The particular context of the infant classroom and my passive role made it possible to stand back enough to be more selective.

Critical incidents are described as being to 'record relevant behaviour or incidents that address a topic or area of interest' (p.171). The disadvantage of the selection of critical incidents as a means of recording lies in the need to identify discrete units such as place, person, situation or type of behaviour in advance. The weakness of this is that it affords too much weight to the perspective of the observer and 'therefore, can be viewed as a constrained system that records a specific slice of



reality, one defined in advance and guided by a specific framework or theory' (Evertson and Green p. 178). Specimen descriptions are seen as more detailed than critical incident records and recording is not intentionally selective except in selection of the subject for observation. They are, however, more focused than field notes. As far as is possible, all that the subject does and says is recorded and others are only included in relationship to the central character. Once the specimen descriptions have been made, the streams of behaviour can be segmented into episodes that reflect the action. From this can be identified various types of units which can provide different types and levels of description enabling, in this case, a picture of the teacher of early reading to emerge.

Although Evertson and Green (1986) describe specimen descriptions as not being intentionally selective, in the case of the present study it was intended to focus only on teacher behaviour that related to literacy learning. It can be difficult to delineate what is literacy related as opposed to say mathematical learning, particularly in the case of very early literacy experiences. For example, in one of the classes the teacher set up a mathematical activity in which children were sorting objects that were 'big' or 'little', the sets were then labelled as 'big' and 'little' and follow up work involved reading the labels. In order to overcome this potential difficulty, everything that involved reading or writing was recorded as well as any discussion that related to text of any sort. In order to verify my own judgements, the teacher was asked in the interview following the session what elements of learning she had hoped would accrue from these cross curricular experiences. It must, however, be recognised that this was not wholly satisfactory when it is considered that one starting point for this part of the study was to analyse and describe that part of the teacher's behaviour that is not readily articulated.

The post teaching interviews were carried out in a way that was intended to be open and not leading the teachers to a view of their teaching that was in any way prespecified by my own perception of what they were doing. However, this was difficult to achieve, in that in order to gain the confidence of the teachers some level of informality was desirable and interaction inevitable. Although I always tried to be non-judgmental in the interviews, the focus of my questions and nature of my own responses must have influenced the teachers' perceptions of my opinions. Whilst this must be recognised as a problem, it should also be acknowledged as a strength. The teachers themselves said they found the sessions increasingly non-threatening and interesting as my questions made them realise the value of what they were doing and encouraged them to reflect further on their practice.

It is also the case that my selection of episodes for discussion gives rise to the accusation of bias. I tried to overcome this by including questions such as 'Was there anything you were particularly pleased with today ?' (Interview Coverland 7.5.93). 'Did you consider there was any literacy learning going on during the morning apart from when you were reading with the children (previously mentioned by the teacher) ?' (Interview Coverland 12.5.93). I was aware of this as an issue and tried, in the analysis of the data to check for evidence of bias.

### Clarification of terms

Although the research adopted an open approach to observation, it was important to clarify in my own mind what aspects I was looking at. This was not to have, as far as was possible, a preconceived idea of what I was looking for but to help with the analysis of the data. I recorded specimen descriptions of all the teacher said that was



related to literacy during the observation times and I discussed these observations with the teachers after the session.

Research that has been undertaken into teachers' thinking has mostly focused on decisions, i.e. when teachers change their plans or procedure during the course of a lesson: 'For example, while teaching a lesson, a teacher may make a decision to continue with the teaching strategy that he or she had planned to use or not to continue with the strategy as a result of a decision' (Clark and Peterson, 1986 p.268). It is, of course, very difficult to define what is a decision and what is not without access to the subconscious of the teacher. For this reason many researchers have defined teachers' decisions as a 'conscious choice'. However, even this implies the existence of pre-existing alternatives, whereas most of the action that takes place in a reception classroom had been shown in the previous part of the study not to be planned teacher intervention. It seemed to have more to do with reaction to children and situations than a reflective consideration of alternatives. It is this spontaneous interaction between teacher and child about literacy that was the focus of this part of the study.

I have decided to call what I was looking at 'responses' as I felt this more clearly represented the level of my own knowledge (i.e. I did not at that time know whether or not teachers were making decisions or reacting in some other way). I also felt it better represented the infant classroom where children may require immediate attention for a variety of reasons (physical as well as intellectual). I was not consciously influenced by this decision in my selection of teacher action to observe - I observed all interaction related to literacy - nor in my selection of episodes to discuss in the interviews following the observation sessions. The term responses



was chosen at the stage of writing up the study to provide a consistent description for what I had observed.

In order to keep the specimen record the page was split into two parts by a vertical line to the left of the centre. On the left of the page were recorded the contributions made by the children. These were not noted in any detail: short comments were written in full or the longer statements were summarised. No note was made of which child had made any particular comment, except in the case of extended interactions in order to follow a particular conversation. On the right of the page were recorded the teacher's comments. These were, whenever possible, verbatim or where the pace of the interactions was too great a description of the content of the response was recorded.

At the start of each different type of teaching session a note was made of the time, the number of children involved and brief details of content from the teachers' daily planning sheet. Specimen descriptions were recorded in two ways. One way was as described above and a further record was kept of the reasons for which the teacher responded to a child or children during the times when the teacher was monitoring work and interacting with a variety of individuals. Clark and Peterson (1986) have shown that many of the teachers' unplanned responses arise when they see something that is not as they think it should be. Categories for the occasions when the teacher responded were drawn up before the first visit based on experience of teaching and observing in infant classrooms and were as follows:

## Chapter Three

Child approaches the teacher:

for assistance with task, uncertain how to proceed;

for assistance with some aspect of literacy (eg word);

for reassurance (is this OK ? Look at this);

when finished task or looking for something to do;

when wants to do something (can I .....?).

Teacher reacts to perceived need of individual;

Teacher reacts to perceived need of group/class.

These were not as identified by the teachers but from my own reading of the situation. As such they were open to misinterpretation but since most were identifiable by the words spoken there was not too much room for incorrect judgement. The only exception to this is in the motives of the teachers in responding to a particular situation where a response to one child might be aimed at more than one child (cf. King's 1979 'public voice'). Although in every other case it was not intended to go in with preexisting categories, it was felt that this would give greater insight into the ways in which the teacher responded. The specimen descriptions and transcripts of the interviews provided me with a wealth of data which I read and reread. From these I was able to identify categories with which I could make comparisons between teachers and between my observations and what the teachers themselves had said about the sessions I had observed. A sample of a record of the specimen descriptions and interview from one visit can be seen in Appendix Four.

### **The Use of Quantitative Analysis**

The observational data from both parts of the study provided me with both structured and unstructured data to analyse. The initial unstructured observations from the



first part of the study gave me notes that I could read and reread. The advantage of the subsequent, structured observations was that I could confirm or reject my early impressions by use of quantitative analysis. In the same way, the specimen descriptions from the second part of the study yielded a wealth of data. This was analysed and reanalysed. Having allocated categories and gained impressions from these categories, the use of quantitative analysis enabled me to check initial impressions. Counting the number of times that something occurred enabled me to check up on my impressionistic judgements made from the less structured observation. This allowed me to look at differences between teachers as to the type of work planned and how much time was spent in different activities. It also gave me the opportunity to analyse my own questions and use simple quantitative analysis to gauge the possible impact of my questioning on the responses given.

This is an example of the unhelpfulness of a strict dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research. In this instance the use of quantitative analysis enabled me to add an element of objectivity to a research design that is largely subjective. This is not to make any claims as to statistical validity. It was not the intention of this research to make any such claims. Here the use of quantification is a means of checking within the data not a means of providing wider generalisability.

King (1979) reports that the more he continued his observations the more he found the patterns predictable and therefore began to record less. In retrospect he regretted the fact that he had not collected any quantifiable data by which to compare teachers and schools. It was particularly the case with the second part of the study that the counting of instances of responses falling in certain categories made my judgements much more open to rigorous scrutiny. This also enabled me to analyse



my questions in the interviews to ascertain the extent to which I may have led the teachers to answer in a particular way.

### **Ethical Issues**

The issue of ethical considerations is not one that seems immediately important in this study. I had been granted access to the schools by agreement of both the headteacher and class teachers. I was known to be a researcher and that the subject of my research was the teaching of reading. I did not have any of the ethical problems experienced by some ethnographic researchers when they 'go native'. I was unlikely to be party to anything illegal or dishonest during my observations I

However, there are certain aspects to the research context where ethical considerations did concern me. In the first part of the study, although the teachers knew that I was researching the teaching of reading and that I was tracking certain children through the year (as had been my original intention) they did not know which specific aspects of their practice I was observing. In the Spring Term they knew I was following an observation schedule but did not know its contents until the end of the observation period. I withheld this information as I felt that, had the teachers known the specific aspects in which I was interested, they might have altered their practice. For example, had they known that I was recording whether they stressed cognitive outcomes in the introduction of literacy based activities, they might well have done so more than was usual. This need not necessarily have been an intentional distortion of usual practice but just that the raising of awareness could have influenced what they did. Cognitive outcomes is a pertinent example of this as Bennett et al. (1984) notes that, whereas teachers stressed cognitive outcomes when talking to the research team, they were more likely to stress procedural outcomes to

the children. I did not however feel that this posed me an ethical problem as I was open with teachers inasmuch as that I told them I was following an observational schedule and why I would not tell them what it contained. An early comment in my research diary says, 'Strange how often researchers seem to lie to teachers about their intentions and fear discovery, yet they state they want to be part of the scene!' Although I did not lie to them, I did recognise that, with the design of that part of the study, I could not be totally honest without influencing my findings in a detrimental way. I did, however, share with teachers afterwards what I had been looking at and my findings.

In the second study, the ethogenic nature of the research meant that the relationship was more open. Teachers were given a chance to explain their actions in the interviews following the observations. Not only did they know the object of my research but they also knew where my interest lay on a day to day basis. Yet even here ethical issues did concern me in relation to my role in the interviews. Although I was deliberately non-judgmental in my interaction, I did try to encourage the teachers' responses by framing questions in a positive way. An example of this was a statement with the intonation of a question: 'I liked the way you introduced it (a book) by saying 'I like this it's got a happy ending'. You were pointing them towards the ending' (Interview Coverland 29.4.93). I also interspersed positive, confirming comments while teachers were talking, for example, when Mrs Harris was apologising for not liking some books a child had brought into school from home, I interjected, 'I thought you seemed most enthusiastic about them!' (Interview 14.5.93). This did raise an ethical problem which was to do with the honesty of my responses. As the study progressed I inevitably made judgements about the teachers and I found that the style of one teacher was more sympathetic to me than the other.



Fortunately, this was more to do with classroom organisation and tolerance of noise than the interactions related to reading. It did, however, mean that I was appearing to be more enthusiastic about practice than I felt. This highlights a tension in a research context where the researcher encourages participants to be collaborators in the research but then writes a report on them. This could constitute a betrayal of trust where their collaboration is used in evidence against them.

This aspect is of more importance when such judgements are to be published. Even though anonymity would protect the participants from recognition, they would recognise themselves and could justifiably feel let down by the apparent dishonesty of my interaction with them. On a broader front, where classroom based research is either dishonest or over critical, this could cause teachers to be less open or willing to take part in further research. I do not feel that this is the case in this study, indeed the contrary may even be so.

Another potential problem is where the findings of the study could worsen the situation of the subjects of the research. Finch (1985) discusses the case of her research into play groups where she found that practices in play groups set up by working class mothers diverged from standards which are perceived as the norm and that these were, at times, dangerous. She was able to overcome her misgivings about the way this data might be used through the framework within which she reported her findings and by the interpretations she made of these findings.

These sorts of issues were unlikely to arise in the present study where the intention was to explain and analyse practice rather than to evaluate its effectiveness. It would, however, have been an issue had I continued with my early design where the



intention was to establish links between childrens' reading strategies and what the teachers did. Analysis did give rise to some tentative judgements about differences in learning. Here the greater progress in traditional areas of reading assessment (word and letter recognition) seemed to be shown by children from the class whose teacher was the most limited in her practice according to my analysis. This aspect of the study was not completed due to the lack of sufficient information about other influencing factors on children's learning. However, it provides a good example of how the way in which data are used can work against the participants or the researchers themselves.

The place of intervention in the research context is an area of ethics that is relevant here. As an adult and experienced teacher in a classroom of young children I had a responsibility outside that of researcher for the safety and well being of the children in the class. Burgess (1985) describes the situation in a classroom where the teacher did not intervene in a situation in which Burgess felt the children to be using pairs of compasses in a dangerous way. In this instance she allowed her role as researcher to overrule her instinct as a teacher and did not intervene. She did, however, discuss the incident with the teacher afterwards and notes that the teacher rationalised it but seemed embarrassed by it. Although, Burgess does not comment on this aspect, it does seem that this could have had a detrimental effect on the relationship between teacher and researcher.

Ethical dilemmas in respect to safety did not seem to me to be relevant here. I was in the classroom as a researcher but also as someone who, in the spirit of ethnographic research, was acting as part of that social context. Therefore, as another adult in a classroom of four and five year olds it would be considered normal practice for that

adult to intervene in the interest of safety. Indeed, in the case of one of the teachers who had a considerably higher tolerance level for noise and boisterous activity than I had, I did intervene on a few occasions. My feeling is that this contributed more to my being seen by teacher and children alike as a typical teacher than would non-intervention. However, in the area of children learning to read I found I did encounter what was, to me, an ethical problem. From a research perspective it was important that I did not intervene in the literacy activities in the classroom as this intervention could well have influenced the teachers in their practice. However, from the perspective of a teacher with a passionate interest in children learning to read, I found it enormously difficult to ignore children's difficulties or enthusiasms, or to just pass them on to the teacher when they came to me. I feel I was successful in maintaining a neutral stance in these instances but it was not something I found at all easy. My position as researcher whilst also being a member of the teaching community rendered my need for objectivity difficult to maintain.

A further aspect of the ethical issue is one that which Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson (1992) discuss. They identify three areas of concern: ethics, advocacy and empowerment. Ethical approaches are seen as minimising the damage to the subjects of research, and advocacy as undertaking research not just *on* subjects but *for* them as well. Whereas it is possible that research can empower its subjects by working *with* them rather than for them. In the research reported by Cameron et al. all the researchers intervened in some way to enable their subjects to make alternative interpretations of their beliefs, attitudes or behaviour. This is at variance with research practice which holds that subjects' beliefs should not be disturbed. They claim that this is more empowering than the usual outcome of research where subjects' views are represented to others by the researcher.



In the case of this study it is my intention to represent teachers of initial reading through my analysis of their practice. However, it is also the case that, by involving them in the second part of the study in discussing their own interpretation of what they were doing, teachers said that they felt my presence, far from being an intrusion, made them see value in what they were doing. To a certain extent, the intervention of the researcher validated their practice for them.

### **Validity**

Concerns about the validity of a research project are always high in the minds of researchers. Quantitative research methods bring with them their own ways of validation which are built into the design. These are not appropriate to ethnographic approaches. In the first place they are inappropriate in that the inductive nature of the research makes it impossible to ensure validity in advance of the study. Secondly ethnographic research requires 'thick description' (Geertz 1975) of a small number of cases which does not render them eligible for statistical tests of validity. The result of this is that often the findings of ethnographic research into reading has difficulty proving itself as its methodology is not valued by its critics.

One of the obstacles amounts to a clash in world views. Advocates of the New Literacy have bravely chosen to carve out a research path that is congruent with their understanding of literacy, tending to favour qualitative, collaborative and case studies which turn to students as informants, rather than subjects. ....Yet the New Literacy finds that even the limited case it makes on its own behalf is dismissed, not because its claims are unfounded, but for failing to use the measures currently governing education. The predominant discourse of quantitative studies and standardised measures makes it difficult for New Literacy programs to gain a national hearing (Willinsky 1990 p.164).

It is not appropriate for ethnographers, in their search for validity, to resort to apologia for not being able to use validation procedures more appropriate to different



research paradigms. Instead there are writers experienced in ethnographic research who propose ways of ensuring validity. Firstly we need to consider what is meant by validity in the field of ethnographic research. Adoption of an ethnographic approach implies a non-positivist stance. Therefore validity is not seen as an immutable truth. The ethnographic search for understanding does not presume one finite interpretation of reality. Rather, the search is for ways of explaining reality. In this way validity is seen in terms of the convincing interpretation of data rather than of the data themselves.

Maxwell (1992) discusses understanding and validity in qualitative research. He says, 'Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose (p.284).' He proposes a typology of validity for qualitative research, the first three of which are relevant here. Descriptive validity which relates to the accuracy of the recording of data and that which is inferred from the data. This can refer to issues of omission, such as intonation from a transcript of an interview. It can also refer to the statistically descriptive aspects of accounts. Maxwell refers here to Becker's (1970) advice to use 'quasi-statistics' ('simple counts of things to support claims that are implicitly qualitative' p. 287). This is not to imply statistical inference to some larger universe but 'only the numerical description of the specific object of study (p.288).'

My use of quantitative methods in the analysis of some of my data could be termed 'quasi-statistics' and served the purpose of testing the validity of the interpretations I was making. For example when I 'felt' that teachers were addressing affective and social concerns as often as cognitive ones. Counting the references not only showed

me how often this was happening, but the percentage of one over another. It also allowed me to scrutinise the effect of my questions on teachers' answers in this area.

Maxwell's second type of validity is 'interpretive validity'. This is an aspect of validity that has no counterpart in quantitative and experimental research. It is an 'emic' rather than an 'etic' perspective (i.e. coming from the situation studied rather than from the researcher). Inferences are, in the first instance, based on the conceptual framework of the people in the situations studied. However, these are always then constructed by the researcher on the basis of all the data. Interpretive validity needs also to apply to participants' unconscious intentions, beliefs, concepts and values.

In these terms, in my own research, I was led to question the descriptive validity of the first part of the study when the interviews with the teachers raised doubts about what I had inferred from the observational data. This led me to include the teachers in a more active way in the second part of the study.

Maxwell's third type of validity; theoretical validity goes beyond concrete description and interpretation to explanation. It involves the application of a theoretical construct to describe and interpret understanding. This is what I was aspiring to do: to explain what these teachers were doing in the initial teaching of reading. It will be one of the functions of the final part of this study to examine the model developed in terms of theoretical validity.



### **Generalisability**

Generalisability or external validity is Maxwell's fourth type of validity. This relates back to the discussion at the start of this chapter about the sample. Maxwell states that sampling in qualitative research is usually 'purposeful' or 'theoretical' rather than strategic in some other way such as randomness to enable statistical analysis. In general, external generalisability is not the aim of qualitative researchers. They have more interest in an 'ideal type' or 'special set'. This research was undertaken to consider the particular cases studied but it was hoped that some aspects of the findings may be applicable to a wider population than the six teachers included in the study. Although these teachers were not chosen because they were thought to be typical, they were chosen as 'telling' (Mitchell 1984). The first four had certain differences in their approach to the teaching of reading and the second two came from two schools in different types of catchment area. All six teachers were acknowledged to be well thought of as practitioners by their schools and local education authority, and were all experienced teaching this age of child.

Hammersley (1992) states that generalisability is possible in ethnographic research but it is less effective when applied to a large population. He advocates that researchers can only be 'reasonably confident' that their interpretations are generalisable to a wider population. He cites a variety of ways of improving or checking validity of generalisation to a large population. One of these is by reference to relevant information from published statistics or studies that have been carried out by others on the same or similar populations. This I have tried to do in the preceding chapter. However, this is largely inadequate for the reasons discussed in that chapter. Also, if the appropriate data were available, it would not be important to carry out the present study. A second way suggested by Hammersley of improving



validity is through the selection of cases 'that cover some of the main dimensions of suspected heterogeneity in the population in which we are interested' (p.190). It is to be hoped that the cases examined here go some way to fulfilling this criterion.

However, my purpose here is not to try to produce something that is necessarily generalisable. I am more interested in producing an explanation and model of practice that can perhaps be tested for wider application at a later date. As the study has evolved I have felt the need to get deeper into the particular rather than branch out into the general.

### **Summary**

As I suggested at the beginning of the chapter, it has been a difficult one to write. This has been partly because of the complexity of the issues discussed but also because I have tried to shape into a coherent whole a process of growth in understanding that took place over three years.

I opened by looking at the research study as a whole. Firstly, I have examined the methodological issues that I had to address at each stage of the research process. Secondly I have described the selection of cases and units of observation; that is the selection of schools, of teachers, of time spent in observation and selection of the focus of attention for the observation. I then found it necessary to separate the two parts of the study, in order to examine my thinking and the decisions I made at those particular times. For each part I have explained how I observed and recorded data, and I have attempted to clarify the terms I use to discuss what I did. After this I was able to go back to the study as a whole and consider some further aspects of the methodology which impact upon the findings and the conclusions I shall be drawing

from them. I have discussed the use of quantitative analysis as part of a qualitative study. I have considered the ethical questions that have arisen out of the research. Finally I have considered the potential validity and generalisability of the whole piece of research. These are aspects that it will be important to return to in the discussion of the findings that are presented in the next two chapters.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is presented in two separate parts, each relating to the separate parts of the study. Although each part will contribute to my analysis, the findings are dealt with here independently.

#### **Part One**

Following the unstructured observations in the summer term of 1991, three whole days at monthly intervals in the Spring Term of 1992 were spent observing in each of the remaining three schools. The observation consisted of

- i) group and individual task analysis;
- ii) a record of time spent by teachers in particular roles; and
- iii) observation of planned teacher intervention.

Following this a questionnaire was sent to each of the teachers and an interview was held with each during the Summer Term.

#### **Group Task Analysis**

Twenty seven literacy based tasks were observed in the three schools during the three days. Six of these were at Granville Road, thirteen at Yelland and eight at Redgate. The children were observed and the work they did examined with the following questions in mind, as discussed on page 90:

- i) Did the teacher make clear to the children what the cognitive outcomes of the task were ?
- ii) Were there opportunities for co-operation ?
- iii) Was there an outcome other than for the teacher ?



- iv) Was the task set within the experience of the child ?
- v) Was the outcome negotiable ?

The results can be seen in Table Four.

Teachers varied in the degree to which they stressed cognitive outcomes, presented tasks to children that had an outcome other than for the teacher and which were within the children's experience. There was, however, a similarity between the three teachers in the lack of opportunities for co-operation and the extent to which

**Granville Road: 6 literacy tasks observed**

	Yes	No	Uncertain
Cognitive Outcomes	5	1	
Co-operative opportunities		6	
Outcome other than for teacher	3	3	
Within children's experience	4	2	
Negotiable outcome	3	3(limited)	

**Yelland: 13 literacy tasks observed**

	Yes	No	Uncertain
Cognitive Outcomes	3	3	7(minimal)
Co-operative opportunities		13	
Outcome other than for teacher	2	11	
Within children's experience	1	6	5 (story) 1 (topic)
Negotiable outcome	2	11	

**Redgate: 8 literacy tasks observed**

	Yes	No	Uncertain
Cognitive Outcomes	8		
Co-operative opportunities		5	3 discussion took place
Outcome other than for teacher	3	5	
Within children's experience	5	3	
Negotiable outcome	1	6	1

**Table Four: Group task analysis**

the outcome of tasks was negotiable. For example (Granville Road 23.1.92), following a reading of the story of The Jigaree (Story Chest), a group of six children were asked to 'write on their own without a spelling book' their own sentence about the Jigaree. They were told to 'really think about the sounds'. When they had completed their sentence the teacher rewrote it with correct spelling and the child copied this onto a piece of paper to be made into a book. The cognitive outcome (thinking about sounds in words) was stressed; there were no opportunities for co-operation during the task (although they did talk about it afterwards). There was an outcome other than for the teacher in that they knew their work would be made into a book for the class. The activity was from within their experience as it was taken from a book they knew well. There was a very limited negotiable outcome in that the sentence could describe the Jigaree doing anything of the child's choice.

### Individual Task Analysis

The twenty seven literacy tasks observed yielded 266 individual child observations, some within whole class groups and some small group work. Given the open ended nature of many of the language tasks, the individual task analysis was found to show more about the *range* of tasks set by the teacher than about individual task demand. Many of the tasks observed could be taken at the child's own level and therefore few occasions of poor match were recorded. Also the research context, particularly where the whole class was engaged in the same activity, resulted in difficulty in making an accurate judgement about the level of task demand for every child. However, an analysis of the results was interesting in the way that it showed the range and type of activities offered in each classroom. In most cases work sheet activities such as phonic or handwriting practice were judged as practice if they were not preceded by planned teacher intervention and as incremental when they

were preceded by teacher input. Tasks which required children to compose written language in some way were judged to be restructuring as they enabled children to use their language in new ways. The results can be studied in Table Five.

Yelland: 13 literacy tasks observed - 127 child observations						
Task no.	No. ch.	*Inc	Res	Enr	Pra	Rev
16	13		13			
17	6		6			
3	10		10			
20	6				6	
12	6			6		
13	6				6	
1	20	1			19	
2	7		7			
9	7	5			2	
10	4				4	
11	25				25	
18	13				13	
19	4				4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>79</b>	

Granville Road: 6 literacy tasks observed-43 child observations						
Task no.	No. ch.	Inc	Res	Enr	Pra	Rev
27	10				10	
25	5		5			
26	10	10				
24	5		5			
07	6		6			
08	7		7			
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>10</b>	

Redgate: 8 literacy tasks observed - 96 child observations						
Task no.	No. ch.	Inc	Res	Enr	Pra	Rev
15	7		7			
14	6	6				
04	25	21			4	
05	12	6			6	
06	7		6		1	
21	25		25			
22	7		7			
23	7	7				
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>45</b>		<b>11</b>	

\*Key: No. = number, ch. = children, Inc=Incremental, Res=Restructuring, Enr=Enrichment, Pra=Practice, Rev=Revision.

**Table Five: Individual task analysis**



This analysis, therefore, gave more information about the type of tasks set than about the quality of the match. Planned teacher intervention is discussed in the next section but instances of this were infrequent, particularly in relation to literacy learning.

As can be seen from Table Five all teachers used restructuring and practice activities, as described above. The broad judgements made here relate more to overall task demand than individual, although in some cases there were obvious differences (for examples see Appendix Two) There was some evidence of incremental tasks, at Granville Road and Redgate these occurred following some specific teacher input (see task 5, Appendix Two). The occasions when tasks were judged to be incremental at Yelland arose when a practice task was too difficult for some children in the group and they received a lot of individual help from the teacher or classroom assistant (For example see Task 1, Appendix Two). Given the small sample of tasks observed, no conclusions about similarities and differences between the teachers can be drawn from this, but the findings are interesting in relation to the instances of planned teacher intervention and point to the teaching of literacy being more spontaneous on the part of the teacher than planned.

### Teacher Role

The three teachers were observed and categorised according to the roles they were judged to be adopting at that particular time. These roles were as defined on page 93:

Supervisor; Facilitator; Monitor; Manager; Model; Instructor; Assessor.

The teacher was observed all the time in the classroom and roles allocated regardless of curriculum area. Afterwards, the times when she was particularly involved in some form of literacy activity were counted separately. The results of these observations can be examined in Tables Six, Seven, Eight and Nine.

	*Supv	Facil	Mon	Man	Mod	Ins	Ass	Total
Granville	213	167	164	42	15	105	64	770
Yelland	145	50	427	39	34	29	5	729
Redgate	268	122	223	30	32	175	0	850

\*Key: Supv=Supervisor, Facil=Facilitator, Mon=Monitor, Man=Manager, Mod=Model, Ins=Instructor, Ass=Assessor

Table Six: Time spent in each role in minutes

	*Supv	Facil	Mon	Man	Mod	Ins	Ass	Total Minutes
Granville	28%	22%	21%	5%	2%	14%	8%	770
Yelland	20%	7%	58%	5%	5%	4%	1%	729
Redgate	31%	14%	26%	4%	4%	21%	0	850

\*Key: Supv=Supervisor, Facil=Facilitator, Mon=Monitor, Man=Manager, Mod=Model, Ins=Instructor, Ass=Assessor

Table Seven: Time in each role as percentage of total 'learning time'

The amount of time in each role has been recorded as a percentage of the overall time because of the difference in number of minutes of observation. Although full days were observed for each teacher, there were occasions when the class went to assembly or the teacher was called away, these times were not recorded. They were not judged to be significant in an analysis of the teacher of initial reading since they were out of the hands of the teacher. However, if the class teacher passed the class over to a classroom assistant or the children were watching television the teacher's role was recorded as facilitator as these were judged to be planned occurrences. It

can be seen that during the day the teachers spent the majority of their time in supervisory or monitoring roles: supervising the class when concerned with non-cognitive activities and monitoring the children individually as they worked. This was almost exclusively the case for Mrs Gilbertson at Yelland whereas use of roles was more evenly spread for Mrs Somerton and Mrs Corby with the roles of facilitator and instructor also having some importance.

	*Supv	Facil	Mon	Man	Mod	Ins	Ass	Total Minutes
Granville	0	62	114	0	15+	37	19	247
Yelland	0	17	312	0	34	5	0	368
Redgate	90	10	164	0	32(10+)	87	0	383

\*Key: Supv=Supervisor, Facil=Facilitator, Mon=Monitor, Man=Manager, Mod=Model, Ins=Instructor, Ass=Assessor  
+ teacher modelling but also instructing

Table Eight: Literacy time spent in each role in minutes

	*Supv	Facil	Mon	Man	Mod	Ins	Ass	Total minutes
Granville	0%	25%	46%	0%	6%	15%	8%	247
Yelland	0%	5%	85%	0%	9%	1%	0%	368
Redgate	23%	3%	43%	0%	8%	23%	0%	383

\*Key: Supv=Supervisor, Facil=Facilitator, Mon=Monitor, Man=Manager, Mod=Model, Ins=Instructor, Ass=Assessor

Table Nine: Literacy time in role as percentage of literacy 'learning time'

This can be seen even more clearly in relation to the learning of literacy as can be studied in Tables Eight and Nine above. These show how much time teachers spent in



the different roles while the children with whom they were interacting at the time were engaged in literacy activity.

Here it can be seen that in each case the large majority of the teachers' time when related to literacy learning was spent monitoring children. For example, children working on aspects of the story of Old Bear (Hissey 1986) while the teacher moved around the class providing spellings and interacting with individuals (Yelland 12.3.92). Occasions when teachers heard children read at the same time as providing spellings and discussing children's work were also recorded as monitoring. When the teacher gave most of her attention to the child reading it was considered to be instruction. An example of the teacher as facilitator would be where the teacher allowed children to read out sentences they had written to the class or a group and encouraged comment from other children (Granville Road 18.3.92). Here the teacher was in a more passive role having set up a situation where children contributed within the teacher's framework. Normally the role of supervisor would not be included in relation to the learning of literacy, but at Redgate School Mrs Corby had the practice of allowing children to keep their own registers on pieces of paper. Although this could have been included as facilitating, it was included as supervision as the teacher herself was most actively involved in concerns such as dinner numbers and so on.

It can also be observed from Table Nine that, whereas Mrs Corby (Redgate) spent 23% of her time in the role of instructor of children in aspects of literacy and Mrs Somerton (Granville Road) spent 15%, Mrs Gilbertson (Yelland) only spent 1%. This confirmed my initial impressions from the observations made the previous summer.

### Planned teacher intervention

Twenty six instances of planned teacher intervention were observed; fifteen of these covered some aspect of literacy, only six of which were teaching reading, five hearing readers, and four teaching writing. The spread of these was very uneven between teachers. It was originally intended to record all instances of planned teacher intervention on an observation sheet, however, it was found that the record sheet of teacher role was a more accurate record of all instances of the teacher instructing. The reason for this was that the planned sessions did not always work out in the way expected and the teacher moved quickly to a monitoring or supervisory role when the occasion demanded. (This is as it seemed to me. I could not check my opinion as there was no time allowed in this part of the study to talk to teachers after the sessions). For example, Mrs Corby would spend five minutes of a twenty minute story reading session with a big book teaching aspects of phonics (Redgate 16.1.92).

At Granville Road School nine instances of the teacher instructing were observed, five of these had a literacy focus. There was one whole class PE lesson and three occasions where the teacher was instructing groups of children in mathematics. The literacy instruction included a brief (five minutes) whole class session on word recognition, two sessions when the teacher was hearing readers exclusively (twenty minutes in all), a small group introduction on letter formation (two minutes), one on writing including spelling, punctuation and content (ten minutes) and a lesson involving modelling of reading behaviour (fifteen minutes). Of the 247 minutes observed where children were involved in literacy activities, twenty were when the



teacher was giving full attention to the hearing of readers, twenty 'teaching' reading and twelve 'teaching' writing.

It has already been observed that Mrs Gilbertson at Yelland spent only 4% of her time in the role of instructor and when she was judged to be modelling this was the reading of a story without using the opportunity to make explicit aspects of reading behaviour. Four examples of the teacher as instructor were observed: two whole class mathematics sessions, one group mathematics and five minutes with a group on the formation and sound of the vowel 'i'. It should be recognised that there was no PE observed at this school as this was limited due to the geographical layout of the school and happened not to occur on the three days of observation.

Mrs Corby at Redgate was observed on thirteen occasions with a specific focus on instruction. These included five non literacy sessions: two PE lessons as a whole class activity and three sessions with a mathematics group. There was also a whole class music lesson in which the teacher, as well as teaching some aspects of music emphasised the rhymes in the songs they learned. She heard readers at the start of each morning as part of a regular routine. While this was going on parents and a classroom helper were also sharing books with children and so she was able to concentrate on the individual child except when a parent wanted to speak to her. One big book session emphasising rhyme was observed and she also planned to work with small groups on aspects of literacy such as word recognition and letter formation. Of the 383 minutes of literacy time observed ninety seven were with the teacher in an active role instructing in aspects of literacy. Thirty four were hearing readers (four occasions), forty three teaching writing (two occasions), ten minutes, as well



as some part of the ten minute music lesson, were spent 'teaching' reading (two occasions).

Table Ten shows in tabular form the different amounts of time in minutes and in percentages spent by each teacher instructing in relation to the whole time observed with the class. It also shows the different amounts of time in minutes and in percentages spent by each teacher instructing aspects of literacy in relation to the time observed where the children were undertaking literacy based activities. It should be noted that the differences noticed between the time in the role of instructor as shown in Table Eight (page 124) and the time recorded in Table Ten result from the inclusion of instances of teacher modelling. This was when the focus of the modelling sessions was to make an aspect of literacy explicit.

School	Minutes teaching %		Minutes teaching literacy %	
Granville	105	14%	52	21%
Yelland	29	4%	5	1%
Redgate	175	21%	97	25%

**Table Ten: Teacher time spent instructing literacy**

### Questionnaire

The questionnaires were sent to the three teachers at the start of the Easter holidays, after the three visits to the schools in the Spring Term (See Appendix One). Many of the questions posed were to find out background details about school and class policies. Others related to teacher views about aspects of organisation for literacy learning. The questionnaire was written at a time when it was still intended to

monitor the progress of children in the class and therefore included questions that are not relevant to the research as it developed. Reported in the main body of the study are only those answers that seem to have a direct bearing on the discussion here. A full breakdown of the answers to the questionnaire can be found in Appendix Five. In order to take the discussion about the role of the teacher further there are just three parts of the questionnaire that are relevant here.

Firstly in response to a question about how often the teacher heard children read, Mrs Corby and Mrs Somerton quoted twice a week and Mrs Gilbertson five times a week, but not always by the teacher. Mrs Gilbertson also made an extra comment about the high priority she gave to ensuring each child read each week. This confirmed the impression gained from the observations. Both teachers who quoted twice a week referred to the importance of this being a quality time with discussion story, illustration etc. Observation of this was only evident in Mrs Corby's class, not in Mrs Somerton's.

All three teachers stated that they included planned modelling of aspects of literacy and that they took groups or the whole class to teach phonics, handwriting, spelling etc. Again this had not been evident in Mrs Gilbertson's class and only occasionally in Mrs Somerton's. From the questionnaire there would appear to be no difference in the importance teachers place on instructional aspects of the teaching of literacy.

An interesting post script by Mrs Somerton was to the effect that she was finding it difficult to spend as much time as she would like on reading since the National Curriculum required more coverage of other subjects than previously.

### Interviews

The interviews were held over an informal 'thank you' lunch at the end of the school year. The interview followed a loose format of ten fixed questions which were followed up by discussion in whatever way the teacher led. The occasion was meant to be informal and took place in local pub or cafeteria so it was inappropriate to use a tape recorder. Rough notes were made during the interviews and these were written up in detail immediately afterwards. Some of the questions related to the aspect of the study that originally intended to link children's performance with what the teacher did and a full summary of the interviews can be found in Appendix Six. However, the opportunity was also taken to try to get nearer to what teachers thought about the teaching of reading than the observation and task analysis had revealed. On reflection these answers were already leading to some of the findings of the second part of the study.

Six of the questions focused on the teachers' opinions and practice in relation to the teaching of reading. A summary of the opinions put forward by the teachers in response to these questions is to be found below.

The first question asked what teachers hoped the children would be able to do in reading by the time they left their class. Mrs Corby said she wanted children to have an interest in books, get to know a few basic words by sight, and to understand and respect books. Mrs Gilbertson put phonics first, citing initial sounds and all blends in reading and writing. She also wanted children to enjoy books and develop confidence in reading. Mrs Somerton looked for children to pick up and choose books spontaneously and that children would read for pleasure and for information.



Question four asked whether teachers varied their practice when hearing children read depending on the child's ability and, if so, how. Mrs Corby said it depended on the book as well as child and that she got them to point at words with their finger. Mrs Gilbertson said she spent more time discussing books with less able children. Mrs Somerton said she saw the time as more than just hearing reading. She enjoyed sharing the comedy in pictures and would take some children on her lap. She said she also liked to use the time to discuss comprehension and prediction. During my time in observation I did not see Mrs Somerton working in this way as, when hearing readers, she was also monitoring the rest of the class.

Question five asked which aspect of reading did they emphasise first, for example word recognition, storyline, enjoyment. Mrs Corby cited enjoyment, interest, the storyline and looking at pictures. Mrs Gilbertson cited phonics as well as enjoyment of books and confidence. Mrs Somerton mentioned only meaning. Question six asked which of the above did they think to be the most important. All three teachers included enjoyment in their answer. Mrs Corby put enjoyment as the most important. Mrs Gilbertson cited the same three aspects as in the previous answer. Mrs Somerton said that it depended on the child and added word recognition to meaning and enjoyment.

Question seven asked how they taught these most important aspects. Mrs Corby said she used encouragement, for example choosing a book an extra treat. She also said she used Breakthrough to Literacy and work sheets, a particular sound for the week, handwriting and other group activities. Mrs Gilbertson mentioned work sheets, flash cards of letters, games such as I-spy and Lotto, incidental opportunities and the television programme Words and Pictures. Mrs Somerton said she taught word

recognition through board and card games, big books and placing word cards around the room. She said she taught phonics through phonic work sheets.

Question ten asked what they thought was the most important thing that they did to enable children to learn to read. Mrs Corby cited the booktime session in the mornings with parents and the classroom assistant. Mrs Gilbertson said that she thought enabling them to read to someone every day was the most important, as well as working as a team with the home and classroom assistants. Mrs Somerton listed the sharing of books (hearing readers and reading stories), developing the child's sense of authorship, developing a sense of value and love of books and letting children see the teacher read.

Two further questions are of interest. The one that related to Mrs Somerton's comment on the back of her questionnaire to the effect that the National Curriculum detracted from the teaching of reading. Mrs Somerton reiterated this opinion. It did not apply to Mrs Corby who was more recently qualified than the others and said she found it made no difference. Mrs Gilbertson admitted she might neglect some other aspects of the curriculum in order to concentrate on language and mathematics. Indeed this is borne out by the amount of literacy time observed in relation to overall time for Yelland school.

It is also interesting to note the changes that teachers said they had made over the four terms of the study: Redgate (Mrs Corby) introducing more assessment and experiment, Yelland (Mrs Gilbertson) and Granville Road (Mrs Somerton) using more 'emergent' writing. This goes some way to confirm my impression that



practice in the schools was becoming more similar despite the fact that they were originally chosen because of their different approaches to literacy.

### Summary

I completed the data collection for this part of the study in July 1992 and spent the summer collating and analysing the findings. For me the most interesting outcome of this part of the research was what it did not tell me. I felt that the focus on the tasks teachers gave children did not really help me to understand the essence of what teachers did to teach reading. There was a whole area of the teachers' interaction with children that I had not had access to. Also the way in which teachers had added and taken away aspects of their practice during the year, becoming more similar to each other in the process, highlighted for me the inadequacy of my attempt at description. Finally the discrepancy between the teachers I appeared to be observing in the classroom and what they said about themselves at the end of the study, made me reconsider my approach. The findings from the second part of the study, presented below, added a different dimension to the picture.

### **Part Two**

In the second part of the study, five half day sessions were spent in each of the two classrooms at Billington and Coverland schools on different days in consecutive weeks at the beginning of the summer term 1993. Visits took place either in the morning or the afternoon and lasted for at least one and a half hours although more usually a whole session (three hours) was observed. It was on days when half the session was taken up by activities that took place outside the classroom (PE or swimming) that only half a session was attended.



In order to write up the findings of this part of the study, I want to take the analysis in the order in which I undertook it. This is because decisions I made and ways of looking at the data were influenced by what I had already found out. Although the observations were followed by interviews on the same day, and I kept an ongoing journal of my thoughts following each visit, I did not analyse my specimen records and transcripts of the interviews until after the final visit. Therefore, I had initial ideas about what I was observing which I then tested by more rigorous analysis. I started this more structured analysis by looking at the interviews with the teachers and then turned to the classroom observations.

### The visits

In all approximately 780 minutes of interaction were observed, 382 at Billington School and 398 at Coverland School. These were recorded in 1190 lines of specimen records, 620 from Billington School and 570 from Coverland School. It was a great surprise to me how close the amount of data gained from each school was. Although the same number of visits were made, differing amounts of time were spent on literacy related activities by each teacher on different days and I had no control over this.

Unlike the earlier study of the four teachers there was no predetermined observation schedule to work from, I went into the classroom with a blank sheet of paper knowing only that I would attempt to record all the responses that related to literacy. I found I was able to write down most of the responses to individuals verbatim and to keep detailed notes of the other interactions where the teacher was talking to the class. A tape recorder was tried in the classroom to provide a backup but, without the benefit of a radio microphone, it provided no more than an occasional support in

the writing up of the record of the teachers' responses. It was also important that immediately following each observation session I was able to write up the observations while they were fresh in my memory. An example of a record of the specimen descriptions from a visit can be seen in Appendix Four.

In both schools the sessions observed were largely similar. On most days there was some form of class or school assembly and there were occasions when children went out of the classroom to PE or swimming. The morning and afternoon periods started with the usual registration activities. However, the morning sessions with dinner arrangements to be made, took considerably longer than the afternoon ones. There were whole class, group and individual activities observed, the majority of which had some element of literacy in them. These were not always planned as literacy activities but aspects of reading or writing were included: for example, a mathematics task which involved children sorting and then choosing the appropriate label for the objects in the sets. The teachers' responses were recorded whenever there was any element of reading or writing involved except in the case of a child being asked to name his or her work without any further discussion of why or how.

During the observation time and on subsequent rereading of my specimen records it became clear that the sessions observed contained five definable interactional situations (Examples of these can be seen in Appendix Seven):

teacher reads to the class;

teacher led discussion;

teacher monitoring;

teacher working with a group;

teacher hearing readers.



These contrast with the way in which the teachers' behaviour was categorised into roles for the first part of the research. The first part of the study, in which the possible roles had been predetermined, highlighted the amount of time spent in the role of monitor by those four teachers and it was intended to examine this role in more detail but also to consider other occasions that were identified (in both parts of the study) as being part of the practice of the teacher of early literacy.

### Interviews with the teachers

Following each observation session I interviewed the teachers about the preceding session. In the first place these interviews were held immediately after the morning or afternoon session, but Mrs Devlin at Coverland School preferred to be interviewed in the afternoon whether or not I had been in to a morning or afternoon session. This was because of her lunchtime commitments which made it hard for her to concentrate over the lunch hour. She also remarked afterwards that she found it easier to reflect on the session with a short lapse of time in between. It is not clear what effect this may have had on the content of the interviews but it did not seem to make any difference to the pattern that was already emerging by the time the change took place. It was noted, however, that there were occasional inaccuracies when she referred to something that had not happened in the morning but was confirmed later to have occurred during the afternoon session. Both teachers sometimes also added thoughts from the previous week to the interview.

Interviews were audio-taped. Both teachers had said they were happy about a tape recording being made of the interviews even though they were not willing to be taped while teaching. Interviews took place in a variety of places chosen by the teacher



herself. At Coverland School the interviews always took place in the classroom, this was usually quiet and undisturbed at the end of the day but had children and other adults interrupting at lunchtime. Billington School, being a small school, had no space readily available to sit and talk undisturbed. The interviews with Mrs Harris took place in empty classrooms, on a bench in the entrance hall and even, on one occasion, outside. These problems did, of course, make the quiet reflection desired a little difficult. However, much of the discussions that take place in primary schools are subject to these restrictions and so this was not a new experience for the teacher, nor indeed for myself.

The length of time for each interview was about thirty minutes, although this varied according to how much I and the teacher had to say and how many interruptions we received. When all the interviews had been transcribed there were found to be 485 lines of answer from 52 questions for Mrs Harris at Billington School and 496 lines from 55 questions for Mrs Devlin at Coverland School. Again I was surprised at how similar the two quantities of data had turned out to be.

School	Billington	Coverland	Total
No. of lines	485	496*	981
No. of questions	52	55	107

(\* The figure 496 is estimated because on one occasion the tape recorder did not work. In order to estimate the number of lines for the five interviews an average of the four that had been recorded was taken and added to the total.)

Table Eleven: Data arising from Interviews

Although there was no set interview schedule for each interview there was a format which was followed with the specific questions being decided during the preceding

observation session and as a result of reflection following the previous visit. The format consisted of several questions which included, 'Do you remember when .....? What were you thinking at the time ?' On the first few interviews I asked whether the teacher thought anything had happened differently because of my presence. Except for the occasion when Mrs Harris said she thought she had done more language work, this question had always received a negative answer so I stopped asking. This is not to imply that I thought the teachers were not influenced in what they did by my being present, but it did not seem as though they were going to tell me so. The questions asked referred either to the collection of information about the classroom or to pick up on points that had been brought out in the previous answer.

I attempted to ask mostly open questions so as not to lead the answers down any particular line of thought. This was not always possible as I tried to make the interviews as informal and similar to an ordinary discussion as possible in order to minimise the feeling of an unequal relationship in the interview. Therefore I used my questions and interjections to try to support and encourage the speaker. I was successful in this to a certain extent in that both teachers commented that they had enjoyed the interview part and had felt that it made them more aware of the value of what they were doing. This, of course, may have led the teachers to be unchallenging in their comments since they received approbation for the comments they made. However, it could equally be said that a more formal interview with less response from the interviewer could have rendered the teachers less confident in what they said.

After the interviews had been transcribed and an initial range of categories had begun to emerge, a count was made of the number of open questions I had asked.



There were found to be forty seven open questions out of the 107 asked. Another forty seven were counted as relating to literacy. An example of an open question would be 'Tell me what you were thinking when .....?'; a literacy related question could be, 'Do you ever criticise a child's writing ? (Coverland 19.5.93). The breakdown of questions posed can be studied further in Table Fifteen on page 150.

### First thoughts

Here, although I shall go on to analyse in greater depth my findings from the observations and interviews with these two teachers, I would also like to give the reader a flavour of the way in which categories emerged and my thoughts became clearer during the period of analysis. This is not intended to be merely self indulgent but can illuminate my own thinking and also highlight where any subjective jump has been made from data to opinion without recognition of what is happening. A more objective analysis will come later where constant working and reworking of the data resulted in a more fixed framework.

Although during the period of observation I was continually reflecting on what I was observing and what the teachers were saying to me afterwards, I was not able to look systematically at my data until after they were all written up and transcribed. However, patterns were already emerging and initial ideas occurred, particularly in relation to the range of strategies used by the teachers to assist children in their literacy learning. In addition to the record of the observations, I also kept a diary in which I recorded my thoughts as they occurred. For example, after the second visit to Coverland I noted, 'Need to phrase questions at Coverland carefully to probe more deeply - e.g. What was actually in your mind while you were ....? Answers seem to be rather general and not specific to the occasion' (Research diary 8.5.93). On



another occasion, I wrote, 'Interaction not really good term - the teacher very often responds to whole class/group in response to a feeling or one or two children's comments' (Research diary 17.5.93).

In the first place a tentative list of strategies became apparent. This list grew and was refined during the time of the observations and on subsequent rereading. At first there was more opportunity to reflect on the observations than on the interviews. This was because of the way in which the observations had to be written up immediately after the sessions whereas the interviews were on tape and did not need to be transcribed at once. For this reason it was some time before it was possible to relate the initial ideas about the classroom observational data to the interviews with the teachers.

The initial list is given below (Table Twelve). As can be seen it is an ill assorted collection of terms culled from a variety of sources. The list was added to and refined constantly and appears in my field notes, not as a tidy list, but words with additions, divisions and deletions apparently recorded at random. One major factor that emerged from this initial list was that it was not enough to consider the teacher as a

Routines
Text to life
Life to text
Text to text
Refocusing
Frame of reference - school
- home
Autonomy
Responsibility
Ownership
Feedback
Referring forward/back

Table Twelve: List of initial strategies observed

teacher of literacy only, there was considerable evidence of an overlap between concern for the teaching of literacy and social concerns in relation to the age and stage of the children in the class.

My observations in the classroom made me very aware of the ways in which the teachers tried to socialise children into the learning and social contexts of the classroom as well as having concern for the actual development of literacy itself. I felt I was looking at Wells' (1987) and Tizard and Hughes' (1984) work (as discussed in Chapter Two) from a different perspective. Whilst I could acknowledge the difficulties a child can experience in the transfer from home to school contexts for learning, I could also see ways in which these teachers, perhaps unconsciously, tried to remediate this.

It was now necessary to analyse the data more closely. I needed to analyse it in a more systematic way and to try to bring some objectivity to my initial subjective impressions. I shall first consider the data arising from the interviews and second, the data from the observations. In each section I shall start by describing how I arrived at the categories I used to describe the teachers' responses and then I shall explain how I analysed this data by more quantitative methods and the results of this.

First ideas about analysis of the interview data emerged more slowly and were influenced by my thoughts about the classroom context. I had hoped, naively, that I would be able to identify reference by the teachers during the interviews to items on my first list of strategies or their concern to replicate home learning behaviour in the classroom. It was not that simple. In fact not one of my terms or ideas was

mentioned by either of the teachers except on the occasion when I asked a specific question about routines.

### Defining the categories

The first tentative categories emerged during the observations and could not be described at all as systematic. However, this initial list and close study of the interview transcripts led me to identify multi-layers of concern: not only concern about the children's literacy learning but also concern about how the child was fitting into the social group of the classroom, how the child was coping emotionally with the transfer to school and concern on the part of the teacher about how she was able to cope with all these factors.

For this reason, in the first place, I went through all the interview transcripts and identified separate statements made by the two teachers. These had an identifiable focus and could be a clause within a sentence or several sentences. I then labelled each statement made by the teacher according to whether it related to cognitive, affective or social concern for the child or whether it was related to a concern about the dilemmas that the teacher faced. For example, Mrs Harris, in response to the question 'What were you hoping they would learn from it (an activity using dictionaries) or was it just an introduction to dictionaries ?' replied:

(1) Well it was an introduction to dictionaries, it was the order of the alphabet - I had in mind - just the beginning of dictionary skills. / (2) It was all this looking at words, words are very interesting and all that part which I think came out very clearly and delighted me. / (3) And I had actually picked out those two poems to tie in with what I had and then had in my mind that I would ask them to look for 'dinosaur' and to look for 'mud' so I had actually thought that out beforehand. / (4) But I didn't know how much time I would have as I thought there was a half hour's assembly and I hadn't realised how long I would leave them looking. (Billington 20.5.93 II. 48-58).



This was categorised as four statements. Three of these were judged to be cognitive (1, 2, and 3) and one a dilemma (4).

Both teachers expressed concern in each of the four areas. Firstly, there was a concern for the cognitive development of the child, i.e. the literacy learning that the teacher thought would ensue from a particular activity or interaction. For example, in response to a question about what she was thinking when asking certain questions at the end of a story, Mrs Devlin said, ' I suppose at the very basic level the idea that the story started and then something happened and then it ended. We've had the story before and I was looking to see if they remembered the names of the characters .....'. (Coverland 29.4.93 ll. 1-6).

Secondly, there was a concern for the social learning of the children who had only recently started school, how they were fitting into life in the classroom and interacting with peers. For example, Mrs Harris, in response to a question about a particular comment she had made about the way some children were spontaneously sharing books with each other, said, 'That is what I was really pleased with. Because they haven't been in school very long and they come in as such individuals and the fact that they've got to this stage.....'. (Billington 20.5.93 ll. 82-86).

Thirdly, there was evidence of a concern for the affective aspects of the child's development. Mrs Devlin, when describing her thoughts about a comment made to a child who had her book the wrong way up, said,

We made light of that, she wasn't very confident in the first few days, tearful so that just went ..... It was pointed out and I think she was able to cope with that and I think she is the sort of child that (it) will only happen once and then tomorrow or the next time will look to see her book is the right way up because she is that type of child. (Coverland 19.5.93 ll. 46-51).

Fourthly, there was a category that was initially designated as 'dilemma', but as the research developed it became clear that these dilemmas were mostly concerned with management issues such as time, number of children in the class, the different abilities of the class and so on. As an example, Mrs Harris when discussing a particular group activity said, 'We have talked a little bit about the alphabet - this you realise was the older group - and I've got some children that I'm very aware need stretching and I'm conscious that I've given time to the new children a bit recently and I felt they needed something to really stretch them.' (Billington 20.5.93 ll.39-43).

The multidimensionality of the classroom was most evident when, as was more usually the case, responses moved between the elements of concern for the child or children's literacy learning, affective and/or social learning and management dilemmas for the teacher. Mrs Harris, when describing her thoughts during a rereading of the Big Book version of Mrs Wishy Washy, said,

..... (I was) (1) trying to get them to look at the print as we go along to notice different things, drawing their attention to some letters and some (phonic?) words and not overdoing it so that you lose the s..... (Cognitive) / (2) I don't want to spoil the story and I want to keep the momentum going. (Affective) / (3) I chose that because it is tied in with the mud ( a reference to a building site outside the classroom window which was of great interest to the children) and I just feel that this corporate saying of the story is very useful, a corporate way of a lot of children looking at print together (Social) / (4) well it is so difficult fitting in reading with children separately so I do think that this is one of the ways that we can..... (Dilemma) (Billington 30.4.93 ll. 12-15,17-23).

It can be seen that, alongside these teachers' concern to develop early literacy skills, lies a concern for other aspects of the child's development. These teachers appeared to be operating on more than one level at a time in their interaction with children. Later quantitative analysis of these responses will show the extent to which these



responses may have been encouraged by my questioning and their relative importance in relation to each other.

Having identified these four categories, the responses in each category were further examined and a large number of sub-categories of concern were identified. In the first place each statement was given a descriptor such as, in the case of the cognitive concerns, phonic awareness, rhyme, comprehension etc. I then grouped these under particular headings.

### *Cognitive concerns.*

These were categorised under to the headings of Skills (including Information skills), Response to Literature and Comprehension. These titles were taken initially from the recently published (and of brief survival) consultative document for the rewrite of the National Curriculum for English (DfE 1993). Information Skills was placed in the first category as this was felt to be more appropriate for the purposes of this study. The choice of this document was largely opportunist owing to its recent publication. It provided a convenient and convincing way of categorising aspects of reading and the existence of the document meant that there was an independent arbitrator available for allocation of aspects into consistent groups. The range of aspects raised by the teachers in the interviews can be seen in Table Thirteen below. A further category of General was needed to include those responses relating to literacy learning but that did not readily fit into one of the three other groups.

Many of the terms used below are well accepted in the vocabulary of literacy learning. However, some may need further explanation. 'Adult use' refers to the concern of the teacher that some of the children's literacy experiences should mirror



those of adults or use in the world outside school. 'General skills' refers to where the teacher referred to skills in general without defining which particular one she meant.

Skills	Response	Comprehension
story structure rhyme word recognition acting like a reader conventions phonics general skills picture cues letter formation spaces between words handwriting alphabet information skills	content choice voice empathy adult use interest intonation	flow of story memory anticipation prediction child's own experience character variety of interpretation retelling story meaning

**Table Thirteen: Cognitive Concerns**

General aspects included: concern to relate the response to the appropriate stage of learning for the individual child; indication of progress in an unspecified area of literacy learning.

It can be seen that some of the skills categories relate entirely to writing as opposed to reading. It was felt that all aspects of literacy should be considered as it would be impossible to separate learning to form written language into units such as letters and words from a growing awareness of the way it is represented in text as part of reading.

#### *Affective concerns*

The same procedure was used for analysis of the affective concerns as for analysis of the cognitive concerns. Each statement was labelled with a descriptor and these

aspects were then grouped into three main types: enjoyment of and attitude to books and learning; emotional state of the child; motivation and generation of interest. The different aspects can be seen in Table Fourteen.

Attitude	Emotional state	Motivation
enjoyment attitude to learning attitude to reading enjoyment of books personal endeavour spontaneity individual response	settling in giving confidence self esteem giving support appropriate to character achievement	suggestion motivation interest

**Table Fourteen: Affective Concerns**

There may appear to be an overlap between the grouping 'response' in the cognitive concerns and the aspect of attitude recorded above. The reason that some statements were recorded under cognitive concerns and some under affective was that the statement was deemed to be cognitive when it related to aspects of response to a particular book or literacy activity, but affective when it related to enjoyment of books in general. This was because it was felt that response to a particular book or aspect of literacy could be deemed to relate to cognitive development, reinforced by its inclusion in the National Curriculum statements of attainment, whereas enjoyment in general related more to the general well being of the child. This was obviously a subjective decision made on my part and one which is open to different interpretation by others.

### *Social concerns*

Although the same procedure was undertaken in the analysis of the social concerns as for the cognitive and affective ones, there were found to be fewer descriptors for each

of the statements and it was possible to categorise all the statements about social concerns into four broad groupings:

- i) group experience, including aspects such as sharing and cooperation;
- ii) routine;
- iii) independence and autonomy;
- iv) behaviour.

### *Management concerns*

These statements were first identified as 'dilemmas', but when the statements were examined it was clear that a more neutral term would be 'management'. However, it should certainly be noted that these were mostly described in terms of uncertainty and conflict of interest. This type of response added to the picture of the teacher as being someone operating at a variety of levels and with many concerns in her mind during her interactions with children.

The statements were examined and a descriptor was allocated to each. As with the social concerns, a small number of groupings was clearly identifiable from the statements and there was not the third layer of analysis that there had been in the cognitive and affective categories. The five areas of concern identified were:

- i) need for children to have individual attention or individualised provision;
- ii) the unpredictability of the situation and the need for the teacher to be flexible;
- iii) the necessity of working within time limits;
- iv) the number of children in the class;
- v) the young age of the children and the newness of the situation for them.



### *General statements*

Finally the few remaining statements that had not been allocated into any other category were examined. There were only found to be ten of these after all the analysis and these referred to:

- i) parents;
- ii) use of other adults in the classroom;
- iii) resources.

### Quantitative findings from the interviews

First analysis of the interview data had shown that the teachers appeared to be operating on many different levels in their interaction with children in relation to literacy learning. Four main categories had been identified from the interviews with teachers about their thoughts while interacting with children during literacy related activities. In order to evaluate the importance of these categories further it was necessary to discover:

- i) how many times they were mentioned by both of the teachers;
- ii) whether there was a noticeable difference between the teachers; and
- iii) whether the type of questions had influenced the distribution of the answers.

I had attempted to ask mostly open questions, aware that I could lead the teachers into giving the kind of answer they thought that I wanted. It was not, however, always possible to ask open questions. Sometimes I wanted clarification of a point or to take the idea a bit further, so it was important to analyse my questions as well as the teachers' responses. When my questions were analysed I found that I had asked

mainly open questions (see Table Fifteen) and those that were not open related predominantly to cognitive areas.

	Billington	Coverland	Total
Open	23	24	47
Cognitive	18	22	40
Cognitive/Affective	3	4	7
Affective	1	3	4
Social	3	2	5
Organisational	4	0	4

**Table Fifteen: Types of question posed**

Following this, the number of statements made by the teachers relating to each of these categories was recorded. See Table Sixteen below. From this it can be seen the largest category for both teachers was cognitive, but, if this is related to the types of questions posed and the fact that the teachers knew that my interest was in the teaching of reading, it seems that there was quite a large proportion of statements made about the other three areas of concern. To examine this point further I examined the different types of question and identified which types of statement followed open questions and which followed cognitive questions. See Tables Seventeen and Eighteen, overleaf.

	Billington		Coverland		Total	
Cognitive	51	46%	42	32%	96	39%
Affective	16	14%	32	24%	46	19%
Social	13	12%	22	17%	35	14%
Organisational	21	19%	16	12%	37	15%
General	1	1%	15	11%	16	7%
Neutral	9	8%	5	4%	14	6%
Total	111		132		244	

**Table Sixteen: Number of statements in each category**

	Billington		Coverland		Total	
Cognitive	19	43%	13	23%	32	31%
Affective	6	14%	16	28%	22	22%
Social	4	9%	13	23%	17	17%
Organisational	9	21%	11	19%	20	20%
General	1	2%	1	2%	2	2%
Neutral	5	11%	3	5%	8	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>		<b>57</b>		<b>101</b>	

**Table Seventeen: Types of statement that followed open questions**

	Billington		Coverland		Total	
Cognitive	27	56%	30	45%	57	50%
Affective	8	17%	12	18%	20	18%
Social	5	10%	7	11%	12	11%
Organisational	6	13%	5	8%	11	10%
General	1	2%	11	16%	12	11%
Neutral	1	2%	1	2%	2	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>66</b>		<b>114</b>	

**Table Eighteen: Types of statement that followed cognitive questions**

These tables show that the teachers were largely similar in the amount of times they mentioned specific areas of concern. For both of them the greatest number of statements related to cognitive areas with Mrs Devlin at Coverland School showing some more concern for social and affective areas than Mrs Harris at Billington School who referred more often to management issues. These differences were only small and the distribution between the teachers was largely similar. The interesting point that comes from these tables is the number of times the teachers brought up areas of concern other than cognitive despite the fact that nearly all of the questions were either open or relating to cognitive concerns. This appears to show that these other areas were of some considerable importance to these teachers.



*Cognitive statements*

In order to look further into the relative importance of each aspect of content in the literacy curriculum for these teachers, the cognitive statements were categorised into skills, response and comprehension and general (see Table Nineteen).

	Billington		Coverland		Total
Skills	27	53%	19	45%	46
Response	4	8%	6	14%	10
Comprehension	10	20%	14	34%	24
General	10	20%	3	7%	13
Total	51		42		93

**Table Nineteen: Distribution of types of cognitive statement**

Here it can be seen that, for both teachers, skills were mentioned most often with comprehension as second. The category 'general', which was mentioned as many times by Mrs Harris as comprehension, related to concern for progress of children in their literacy learning and the appropriateness of the work to the child's stage of development. Further analysis showed that phonics or letters were mentioned fourteen times by the teachers and words and word recognition were also mentioned fourteen times.

*Affective statements*

The affective statements were categorised into:

- i) enjoyment of and attitude to books and learning;
- ii) emotional state of child including confidence, self esteem and achievement;
- iii) motivation and generation of interest, suggestion etc.

	Billington	Coverland	Total
Enjoyment	5 31%	9 28%	14
Emotional state	5 31%	12 38%	17
Motivation	6 38%	11 34%	17
Total	16	32	48

**Table Twenty: Distribution of types of affective statement**

As can be seen in Table Twenty above, the distribution of these three groups of affective statement is largely similar for each of the teachers. However, Mrs Devlin (Coverland School) mentioned this aspect of the child's learning more frequently than Mrs Harris (Billington School).

#### *Social statements*

These were also categorised into different groupings as follows:

- i) group experience;
- ii) routine;
- iii) independence/autonomy;
- iv) behaviour.

Here also it can be seen (Table Twenty One) that Mrs Devlin mentioned social learning more than Mrs Harris. This is balanced by the fact that Mrs Harris at Billington School mentioned cognitive and managerial issues more (see Tables Nineteen and Twenty Two). It can be seen that each teacher mentioned a different aspect most often. The theme of routines was one which Mrs Devlin at Coverland School referred to many times and will be discussed in more detail later. Looking back through the data, although this was one occasion when I did ask a specific

question about an aspect that had emerged from my ongoing observation and study of the interview tapes, the frequent mention of routines was not influenced by my question as this was asked at the beginning of interview number four when routines had already been mentioned eleven times. When it was brought up by Mrs Harris it was in relation to a particular child rather than a teacher related issue as it was with Mrs Devlin (Coverland School).

	Billington		Coverland		Total of social statements
Group	6	46%	1	5%	7
Routine	1	8%	13	59%	14
Independence	5	38%	6	27%	11
Behaviour	1	8%	2	9%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>22</b>		<b>35</b>

**Table Twenty One: Distribution of types of social statement**

#### *Management statements*

These statements, which were initially identified as 'dilemmas', relate to aspects of management that were seen as presenting a problem to the teacher. These statements were categorised into:

- i) children's need for individual attention or provision;
- ii) unpredictability of situation and need to be flexible;
- iii) restrictions of time;
- iv) number of children in class;
- v) newness and age of children.

These can be studied in Table Twenty Two overleaf.



	Billington		Coverland		Total of managerial statements
Individuals	8	38%	5	31%	13
Unpredictability	6	29%	2	13%	8
Time	3	14%	-		3
Class	1	5%	5	31%	6
Age	3	14%	4	25%	7
Total	21		16		37

**Table Twenty Two: Distribution of types of management statement**

By comparing the three preceding tables it can be seen that there is some relationship between the concerns raised. For example, Mrs Harris at Billington School was concerned to develop children's group skills and voiced issues about the individuality of the children as one of her main concerns in the management of learning. Both teachers mentioned the need to develop children's independence which could relate to Mrs Devlin's mentioning of the number of children in the class as being an area of concern in the management. Both raised the unpredictability of the children at this age, this could be said to relate to both teachers' concern for the emotional well being of the class. These can only be tentative deductions since further dialogue with the teachers would be needed to examine these relationships further.

Although these aspects relate only peripherally to the teaching of reading, they have to be given consideration as they were raised so many times in the context of the teachers' experience in literacy related activities in the classroom.

The whole issue of management of learning and its relation to the teachers' concerns with social and affective issues as well as cognitive ones was a subject that exercised

me considerably. Why did teachers raise these other interests when the subject of the research and the interviews was the teaching of reading ? The simple answer to this is, of course, that these issues are all inseparable in the classroom situation. But why are they inseparable ? Can the teacher not focus exclusively on the teaching of reading while that is the subject of her teaching ? This is where notions of child centredness emerge. The ethos and philosophical underpinning of early years education has always held the child as central to the learning process. Although much of the rhetoric of the National Curriculum and the debates about approaches to the teaching of reading seem to move teachers away from concern with the child to concern with the curriculum, the centrality of the child does seem to be still, at least implicitly, important to teachers.

In order to explore the relationship between the child, literacy, and the teacher the interview answers were further categorised to discover which of these aspects was to the fore in the teachers' thinking. This was an interesting exercise in that I had not set out with this aspect in my mind. Therefore I had again to look carefully at my own questions as well as the teachers' responses. In the first categorisation of the questions I knew I had set out to ask as many open questions as was possible and to focus on the literacy learning. However, in this further look at my questions and the teachers' answers, I did not know how my own questions would appear. The focus of my research was on the role of the teacher in early literacy learning, therefore it seemed probable that my questions would centre on these two issues. However, I was also a trained and experienced infant teacher. How much might this influence my questioning to focus the teachers' attention on concern for the child ?



Analysis of both the questions and the answers was not found to be a simple matter of categorisation into literacy related, child related or teacher related because the questions and to a lesser extent the answers were a complex mix of one, two or three elements (see Tables Twenty Three and Twenty Five). For example, I asked, 'What are your feelings about trying words ? For instance Katie was trying to write 'treasure box'.' This pointed first to literacy and then to the child. Mrs Devlin answered,

(1) If they are happy to have a go then I would be happy to let her have a go, sometimes I write it for them, this morning I would have said, "have a go" but it's a quieter time (*Affective - confidence*) / (2) and they've been used to a smaller group too, I suppose they have had more opportunity to say..... (*Management - number of children in the class*) / (3) I've usually got a pad or something to say this is what it looks like and they'll take over to copy or they'll just look at it and make their own attempt. (*Cognitive - skills*) / (4) I am trying to make them more independent than they are, that particular group now, (*Social - autonomy*) / (5) because of the new ones coming and that we are a bigger class.' (*Management - number of children in the class*) (Coverland 7.5.93 II.52-62).

Here the teacher starts talking about the needs of the children (1 and 2), goes on to relate to the visual aspect of spelling (3) and then returns to the needs of the children (4 and 5).

	Billington	Coverland	Total questions
Teacher related	9	13	22
Child related	8	4	12
Literacy related	11	15	26
Teacher and literacy	6	3	9
Teacher and child	2	2	4
Child and literacy	15	17	32
Teacher, child and literacy	1	1	2

Table Twenty Three: Distribution of question focus



As can be seen from the table above, whereas my largest simple category was related to literacy and the second to the teacher, when the questions joined two aspects together I placed the child alongside the literacy much more frequently than any of the other groupings. In fact, when this was reworked to count all the questions that referred to the child, all those that referred to the teacher and all those that referred to literacy, literacy was still found to be the most frequent but the child came second with the teacher being referred to least (see Table Twenty Four). It can also be seen that I referred to the child almost as many times as to literacy during the interviews with Mrs Devlin at Coverland. This must have had some influence on the way in which the teachers responded to my questions. One reason for this is that I was referring to specific incidents to stimulate the teacher's recall. This often necessitated reference to a particular child which may have led teachers to refer to children more.

	Billington	Coverland	Total
Teacher	17	19	36
Child	17	34	51
Literacy	32	35	67

**Table Twenty Four: Count of reference to child, teacher or literacy in interview questions**

However, by looking at Table Twenty Five below, it can be seen that there is very little difference between the number of references to each of the aspects by the teachers in their responses to my questioning. Categorisation of the responses from the teachers did not produce as many complex statements (that is statements where two factors were referred to in the one statement) as my own questions, this is most probably because the responses were longer than the questions and moved from one

focus to another. It was therefore not necessary to recount these including the complex statements as they were so few and did not affect the overall distribution.

	Billington	Coverland	Total
Teacher related	24	20	44
Child related	22	25	47
Literacy related	26	20	46
Teacher and literacy	2	5	7
Teacher and child	3	1	4
Child and literacy	3	4	7
Teacher, child and literacy	1	-	1
Total	81	75	156

**Table Twenty Five: Distribution of focus in answers**

From these findings it did not seem as though teachers placed greater emphasis on one aspect more than another, except inasmuch as my questions may have influenced them to respond more about the literacy learning or about the child as well in the case of Mrs Devlin at Coverland School. It was therefore necessary to look further at the relationship of the teachers' responses to my questions. This can be examined most easily by the series of questions in Table Twenty Six overleaf. From this it can be seen that there was little difference overall between the categories. In other words the teacher did not change the focus from the question and introduce one new aspect (child, teacher or literacy) more than any other, except in as much as literacy was represented a little less. There was, however, a difference here between the responses given by Mrs Devlin at Coverland School where she was far less likely to turn the subject to literacy than to one of the other aspects (either the child or, to a lesser extent, the teacher).

<p>1. How often did the teacher give a child related answer when the question did not point to one ?</p> <p>B = 7 times from 26 questions 27%</p> <p>C = 9 times from 31 questions 29%</p> <p>Total = 16 times from 57 questions 28%</p>
<p>2. How often did the teacher give a teacher related answer when the question did not point to one ?</p> <p>B = 11 times from 34 questions 32%</p> <p>C = 9 times from 37 questions 24%</p> <p>Total = 20 from 71 questions 28%</p>
<p>3. How often did the teacher give a literacy related answer when the question did not point to one ?</p> <p>B = 6 times from 19 questions 32%</p> <p>C = 3 times from 19 questions 16%</p> <p>Total = 9 times from 38 questions 24%</p>
<p>4. How often did I ask for a literacy related answer and not get one ?</p> <p>B = 10 times from 33 questions 30%</p> <p>C = 7 times from 36 questions 19%</p> <p>Total = 17 times from out of 69 questions 24%</p>
<p>5. How often did I ask for a child related answer and not get one ?</p> <p>B = 8 times from 26 questions 30%</p> <p>C = 4 times from 34 questions 11%</p> <p>Total = 12 times from 60 questions 20%</p>
<p>6. How often did I ask for a teacher related answer and not get one ?</p> <p>B = 0 times from 18 questions 0%</p> <p>C = 2 times from 19 questions 10%</p> <p>Total = 2 times from 37 questions 5%</p>

Table Twenty Six: Relationship of question to answer



From this it can be seen that there was little difference overall between the categories. In other words the teacher did not change the focus from the question and introduce one new aspect (child, teacher or literacy) more than any other, except in as much as literacy was represented a little less. There was, however, a difference here between the responses given by Mrs Devlin at Coverland School where she was far less likely to turn the subject to literacy than to one of the other aspects (either the child or, to a lesser extent, the teacher).

Another way of looking at this can be seen in questions four, five and six. Here it can be seen that for both teachers it was rare that I would refer to the teacher without them picking up and responding to some aspect of this. Equally it was not often that Mrs Devlin ignored the chance to talk about the children.

### Summary

The two teachers in this study did not appear to look upon the teaching of reading as being something that related only to literacy but that raised all sorts of other issues in their minds about the learner, the nature of the classroom context, and how these impinged upon the teacher herself. Also it can be seen that in their interactions with children about literacy, they did not seem to think only about the literacy learning but had in their minds a range of other concerns for the child's social and affective development and concerns about the problems they saw in the classroom situation.

### **The Observations**

Having gone through the interview data systematically, I returned to the observations and went through these in more detail. In the first part of this section I shall

describe how I arrived at a refined definition of categories, then I shall consider how I analysed this data by more quantitative methods and the results of this.

### Defining the categories

Throughout the time I was observing in the classrooms, my thoughts were proliferating about what was actually going on. I produced from these a list of initial categories (see Table Twelve on page 140). However, these needed to be analysed in more detail and the data reexamined to identify further categories. It was also important to do this in the light of the issues that arose from consideration of the interview data. It must be noted here that the nature of the observational data was different from the interviews in that with the interviews I had used a tape recorder and transcribed all the content of the interview sessions (except one where the tape recorder had not worked). Thus, although my identification of categories was essentially subjective, I could claim some reliability in that I had been able to be more objective by inclusion of all the responses made by the teachers. This was not the case with the observations. For the reasons given earlier, these sessions were not recorded but detailed narrative records in the form of specimen descriptions were kept of the literacy related incidents. The result of this was that the incidents recorded were limited to those that I identified as being related to literacy learning, although I did attempt to confirm this in the interviews after the observation. Also it was not always possible to write verbatim every word the teacher used therefore what I chose or managed to record is likely to reflect my own interpretation of the situation and could have been influenced by the categories I had already identified.



Looking again at my initial list of initial strategies that the teachers used, it can be seen from Table Twelve on page 140 that these strategies are of three distinct types:

- i) related to literacy learning;
- ii) strategies that teachers were using in their interactions about literacy;
- iii) classroom ethos.

Text to life, text to text, life to text and frame of reference refer to aspects of literacy learning. Routines, refocusing, feedback and referring forward/back are strategies that teachers were using in their interactions about literacy. Autonomy, responsibility and ownership are more nebulous aspects that, after more detailed analysis of the interviews with the teachers, were identified as areas of concern for them and seemed to relate to classroom ethos. Further reading and rereading of the specimen descriptions added to this list and it became necessary to separate each category and identify the type of group it might fall into. The two groupings that seemed most relevant were literacy learning and teacher strategies. The third type that I have referred to above was not readily identifiable from the data. This seemed to have arisen more from a feeling that came from the whole context of observations and interviews rather than from specific responses.

### Responses related to literacy learning

In the same way as the data from the interviews were analysed I first went through all my specimen descriptions and labelled each response or series of related responses to identify which aspect of literacy was involved. Where possible I used the same labels as had been used in the analysis of the interview data. Following this these aspects were grouped into the three areas of skills, response and comprehension. An example can be seen over the page.



10.06 Monitoring Thunderbirds group

To whom	*Reason	Teacher response
40 S.	E	Helps with writing name, describes letter formation - haven't you done it beautifully ?
41		
42		
43 A.	C	How do I know this is base four
44		Go and write the number on it.
45 P.	C	What do you think 'base' would begin with. Have a try - get a piece of paper from the box and have a go.
46		
47		
48 A.	C	Anything else you can tell me ?
49 He would like to		What do you need for that ?
50 put it in a book		
51 P.	C	Why don't you do some writing about it
52		'Have a go' writing
53		
54 P. (basis)	C	You've tried really hard - If I said buh aye sis what would be aye
55		writes 'bases' shows and then fold paper
56		If I kept(hid) it would you know how to write it now ?
57		
58		
59 Child referring	E	But he was grumpy first of all
60 to end of book		
61 he had just chosen		
62 P. (basis)	B	Well tried I Look at that....what letter should it be ?
63		
64 A. had	D	Where did you begin ? Do you think that's right ? Where do you usually begin ?
65 written book		
66 back to front		

- \*Key B = for assistance with some aspect of literacy  
 C = for reassurance  
 D = when finished task or looking for something to do  
 E = Teacher reacts to perceived need of individual

Observation: Billington 30.4.93 ll. 40-66

These lines were labelled and then categorised as shown in the table below.

Lines	Broad area	Aspect
40	skills	letter formation
43	response	writing for purpose
45	skills	initial sound
47	response	autonomy
54	skills	sounds
59	comprehension	meaning
64	skills	conventions

Table Twenty Seven: Record of literacy related responses

Details about the number and distribution of these can be examined in the next section.

Teacher strategies

Analysis of the teacher strategies observed arose partly from the labels allocated to certain of the interactions that did not relate to aspects of literacy and partly from my observation that the record of what the teacher said contained a great number of questions. This led me to look further at the kind of linguistic strategies the teachers seemed to me to be using. It should be acknowledged here that, because this analysis did not take place until after the end of the time in school it was not possible to discuss their use of strategies with the teachers.

The list of strategies was found to be a long one (see Table Twenty Eight), despite the fact that questioning was by far the largest group (297 questions out of 675 uses of the strategies).

1	Questioning
2	Stating
3	Ordering e.g. 'Look', 'Show me'.
4	Anticipating e.g. 'Let's.....' 'We're going to be doing .....
5	Affirming e.g. 'I'm glad you put a full stop'
6	Explaining
7	Praising
8	Correcting
9	Reminding e.g. Do you remember when you needed help with writing your name ?
10	Feigning e.g. pretending surprise at the wrong word being read
11	Suggesting e.g. 'I'll leave the book out for you to look at later'.
12	Wondering e.g. 'I wonder if he'll find Teddy' (during story reading)
13	Repeating as when the teacher echoes a correct response that has been given by a child.
14	Answering - in response to a child's question.
15	Speaking in unison as when children are encouraged to join in with a chorus or repeated line in a book.

**Table Twenty Eight: List of teacher strategies identified**

The strategies were identified and categorised from the observations in a similar way to the responses related to literacy learning. For example, in the extract that follows, strategies were allocated where it seemed to me they were being used as can be seen below.

### Record of responses

To whom	Teacher response
1 9.10	<i>While register etc. is being taken S. and Je. are</i>
2	<i>writing the 'leader' and 'tadpole feeder' signs. Teacher</i>
3	<i>suggests that they can make their own label.</i>
4	S. is our leader today, you could make
5	your own label
6	We also need a tadpole feeder, Je. you can
7	make your own label, it was T.'s name before,
8	you make your own label, choose your own felt
9	tip - <i>continues with class while children write -</i>
10	<i>ooo Je. you've done that well - reads sign</i>
11	<i>aloud and sends Je. to feed the tadpoles</i>
12	S. that's wonderful
13	Tomorrow I'll have someone else write our sign.
-----	
14 Where's V. ?	She's in Cyprus - we'll have a look
15	in the big map book in the afternoon.
-----	

Observation Coverland 19.5.93 II. 1-15.

Line	Teacher strategy
4	Statement
4 / 5	Suggestion
6 - 8	Anticipation
10	Praise
12	Praise
13	Anticipation
14 / 15	Anticipation

Table Twenty Nine: Teacher strategies



### Quantitative findings from Observations

As was the case with the interview data, I found it helpful to analyse the data in a more quantitative way, in order to gain a clearer picture about my observations in the classrooms.

#### *Contexts for literacy learning*

In order to examine the data in a more systematic way I first identified the contexts for the literacy related incidents. Each class was visited five times and five types of interaction were observed. These contrasted with the way in which the teachers' behaviour was categorised into roles for the first part of the research. The five types of interaction were defined as follows:

- teacher reading to the class (TRC);
- teacher led discussion (TLD);
- teacher monitoring (TM);
- teacher working with group (TWWG);
- teacher hearing readers (THR).

(Letters in brackets indicate the abbreviations used in the tables.)

Owing to the way in which the observations had been recorded it seemed important to consider approximately how much time had passed during each type of interaction (Table Thirty) and also how many lines of specimen description had been recorded (Table Thirty one) This was because the recording of the interactions was limited by a number of factors:

- i) how much I was able to write at any one time;
- ii) the fact that subsequent analysis showed two types of interaction running parallel, for example while Mrs Devlin at Coverland School

was hearing readers she would break off and monitor individuals progress; and

- iii) the pace of note taking sometimes meant that I did not record the time of a change of activity until a little later when only an approximate time could be recorded.

	Billington Minutes %	Coverland Minutes %	Total Minutes
TM:	136 37%	107 28%	243
TLD:	89 24%	105 27%	194
TWWG:	59 16%	67 17%	126
TRC:	50 14%	47 12%	97
THR:	30 9%	60 16%	90
Total:	364	386	750

**Table Thirty: Approximate number of minutes for each type of literacy interaction observed**

As can be seen there is some similarity between the time each teacher spent in each kind of interaction. There are some small individual differences possible reasons for which are discussed below.

As with the previous part of this study, monitoring is the type of interaction in which the teachers spent most of their literacy related time. The greatest difference is between monitoring and hearing readers. Mrs Harris at Billington School appeared to spend more time monitoring and less time hearing readers than Mrs Devlin. This was because Mrs Devlin managed to hear readers parallel to monitoring individuals work, whereas, while Mrs Harris did on some occasions try to hear readers while monitoring, she was not able to give much of her attention to it and I was unable to record the interactions as other children were waiting round about her

for attention. The only time I was able to record Mrs Harris hearing readers was when she kept two children out of assembly for the purpose of hearing them read.

	Billington Lines    %	Coverland Lines    %	Total Lines
TLD:	247    40%	100    18%	347
TM:	127    21%	135    24%	262
TRC:	87    14%	133    23%	220
THR:	51    8%	137    24%	188
TWWG:	108    17%	65    11%	173
Total:	620	570	1190

**Table Thirty One: Number of lines for each type of literacy interaction recorded**

However, not only did Mrs Harris spend a longer time monitoring than Mrs Devlin, but there was less literacy interaction recorded. This is because, as mentioned above, I did not record the literacy interactions associated with the hearing of reading as the organisation of the classroom meant I could not hear what Mrs Harris was saying. This reinforces the statement earlier that the quantitative analysis can only be taken as indicative since the means of recording was so subjective and context dependent.

Although I spent more time observing the teacher monitoring it can be seen from the table above that more interactions were recorded during teacher led discussion. Also it can be seen that more of the teacher led discussion at Billington was literacy related than at Coverland - this is despite the fact that I was only recording the literacy related discussion. At Coverland School, Mrs Devlin tended to discuss other things, behaviour, news, etc.

Mrs Harris and Mrs Devlin spent about the same percentage of time working with a group. However, when Mrs Harris was working with a group I recorded more



literacy related interactions. This seems to imply that she was more focussed on literacy during these sessions.

Mrs Harris and Mrs Devlin spent about the same percentage of time reading to the class. However, when Mrs Devlin was reading to the class there was more literacy related interaction recorded than with Mrs Harris. This could lead to the assumption that, at Billington School, Mrs Harris actually read from the text more.

### Reasons for responses

During my observations of the teacher monitoring I was interested to consider the reasons for teachers' responses: that is, whether they resulted from a child approaching the teacher or the teacher initiating the interaction. This was to give me more information about the interaction and was interesting particularly in the light of previous studies that had shown teachers to intervene more when they perceived that something was not going as they would have wished (Clark and Peterson 1986). I looked at seven possible reasons, five that were child initiated (ABCDG) and two which were teacher initiated (EF):

- A - for assistance with task, uncertain how to proceed;
- B - for assistance with some aspect of literacy (e.g. word);
- C - for reassurance (is this OK ? Look at this ?);
- D - when finished and when looking for something to do;
- E - teacher reacts to perceived need of individual;
- F - teacher reacts to perceived need of class/group;
- G - when wants to do something (can I .....?).

An example of the way in which I recorded these in my field notes can be seen below.

To whom	Reason	Teacher response
63		Who'd like to come next
64 V.	G	You've done some lovely writing -
65		just finish that word
66 R. to read		Did you read this last night
67 V.	G	Finish of your name
68 R.	E	Are there enough words for what you
69		said - <i>points to text</i>
70 N.	D	In a little while you can tell me ....
71 S.	A	I'll fix it ( <i>book</i> ) later
72 R.	E	What's he doing now
73		Would you like to keep that book tonight
74		and read it to your Mummy
Child changed book		
75 P.	D	Just wait there
76 V. Reads her writing to teacher		
77 P.	D	That says 'blob'
78		I'm glad you got your name right
79 S.	A	<i>Teacher mends cover</i>
80 Je.	B	You're doing ever so well Jennifer,
81		that's all your own writing
82 V. reads	E	I don't think I could do that
83		What's he doing now ?
84		I think he is, I think he is holding one
85		I think you're right
86	E	Look again, you, look again
87 Reads with her		

Key A = for assistance with task  
 B = for assistance with some aspect of literacy  
 D = when finished and looking for something to do  
 E = teacher reacts to perceived need of individual  
 G = when child wants to do something

Observation Coverland 7.5.93 II. 63-87

The results of the analysis of the reasons for the teacher's responses show largely similar reasons for the teacher responding to a child or children. These can be seen in Table Thirty Two overleaf.

	Billington School	Coverland School	Total
A	0	2	2
B	3	6	9
C	5	1	6
D	9	10	19
E	16	18	34
F	5	3	8
G	1	2	3
Total	39	42	81

Overall most frequent = E (41.9%), 2nd = D (23%)

Billington most frequent = E (41%), 2nd = D (23%)

Coverland most frequent = E (43%), 2nd = D (24%)

Table Thirty Two: Reasons for intervention or response

Thus 52% of interactions were teacher initiated (Billington 54%, Coverland 50%) and 48% of interactions were child initiated (Billington 46%, Coverland 50%) with no great difference between schools.

These two aspects of the analysis (time and lines recorded and the reasons for teacher interaction) acted more to provide a guide to comparability between teachers than to reveal anything significant about what the teachers were doing. There can be a feeling at this stage in a research project of this kind that data are being analysed because they are there and not for what they reveal. However, without close quantitative analysis of the data, qualitative findings may be missed or attributed with greater significance than they warrant.

Responses related to literacy learning

The teachers' responses to children were categorised according to which aspects of literacy learning they related. Wherever possible, the same labels as were used when categorising the statements about literacy made by the teachers during the



interviews were applied to the teachers' responses. These aspects were then grouped according to whether they related to skills, response or comprehension. It was then interesting to analyse the results in a quantitative way in order to discover the answer to certain questions about the relative importance of each aspect. Thus the teacher responses were categorised by skills, response or comprehension (see Table Thirty Three) with the following questions in mind: How many in each category? What percentage of the responses fell into each category? Was there any difference between teachers? Was there any difference between types of activity?

It can be seen that the two teachers had different emphases, with Mrs Harris at Billington School placing more emphasis on skills teaching than Mrs Devlin at Coverland School. In every context, except when working with a group, more of Mrs Harris' responses related to skills than Mrs Devlin's. Mrs Devlin stressed the other two aspects, particularly comprehension. For both teachers response was the least mentioned. When working with a group both teachers emphasised skills almost to the exclusion of the other aspects. It can also be seen that, when monitoring, skills were nearly twice as prevalent as the other two categories. It is interesting here to note that the group activities which were underway when the teacher was working with a group and monitoring were writing activities and it was then that skills were emphasised in this way. In contexts which were more related to books and reading, Mrs Harris still stressed skills the most (although to a slightly lesser extent) when hearing readers and leading a discussion but concentrated slightly more on comprehension when reading to the class. In contrast Mrs Devlin stressed comprehension more when reading to the class and hearing readers and stressed response when leading a discussion.

Teaching context	Skills			Response			Comprehension		
	B	C	Total	B	C	Total	B	C	Total
TM	24 64%	15 50%	39	7 18%	7 23%	14	7 18%	8 27%	15
TLD	17 52%	4 27%	21	9 27%	7 46%	16	7 21%	4 27%	11
TWWG	16 80%	8 80%	24	2 10%	0 0%	2	2 10%	2 20%	4
TRC	14 40%	10 22%	24	5 14%	10 22%	15	16 46%	25 56%	41
THR	11 58%	10 18%	21	1 5%	10 18%	9	7 37%	37 65%	44
Total	82	47	129	24	34	58	32	76	108
%	60%	30%	44%	16%	20%	20%	24%	50%	36%

Key: B = Billington School

C = Coverland School

**Table Thirty Three: Literacy categories of responses**

### **Learning to read**

Analysis of the data shows these two teachers stressing decoding skills and comprehension particularly in their teaching, although with different emphases for each. It is interesting to compare the classroom emphasis with the emphasis placed on these aspects in the interview sessions. As can be seen from the table below, there was a consistency between what Mrs Harris said were her priorities and what was observed in her classroom at Billington School. However, this was not the case with Mrs Devlin who spoke more about her concern for skills in the interviews while she referred to comprehension more in her responses to children. This can only be a

tentative comment as my influence as a questioner in the interviews and the subjective and chance nature of what I observed makes comparison difficult.

	Skills	Response	Comprehension
Billington observations	60%	16%	24%
Billington interviews*	53%	8%	20%
Coverland observations	30%	20%	50%
Coverland interviews*	45%	14%	33%

\* the interview percentages do not add up to a hundred because of the fourth category 'general' which was not relevant to the classroom observations.

**Table Thirty Four: Comparison of emphases in literacy learning**

**Teacher strategies**

Teachers adopted many strategies when interacting with children. Of the sixteen identified earlier, on analysis the most evident were found to be: questioning, stating, ordering, anticipating, affirming, explaining, and praising. The incidence of these ranged from 297 times to 26, all the others were observed on eleven or fewer occasions.

It can be seen from Table Thirty Five that questioning is by far the most common strategy used. Statements were the next most used but a long way behind and praising was the least observed of the seven strategies recorded on the table below. Thus the strategies used by the teachers while they were observed were similar except for a small difference in order between the middle most used categories but there was very little difference in amount.



		*Q	Aff	Ord	St	Ex	Pr	Ant
TM	Billington	43	13	9	11	6	5	3
	Coverland	27	6	10	13	1	10	12
	Total	70	19	19	24	7	15	15
TLD	Billington	38	8	2	11	5	5	10
	Coverland	12	2	3	4	7	3	10
	Total	50	10	5	15	12	8	20
TWWG	Billington	29	4	7	8	3	1	3
	Coverland	17	2	10	1	2	0	3
	Total	46	6	17	9	5	1	6
TRC	Billington	23	3	6	4	1	0	3
	Coverland	28	9	3	17	11	0	4
	Total	51	12	9	21	12	0	7
THR	Billington	26	1	1	2	2	0	0
	Coverland	54	3	8	13	11	2	8
	Total	80	4	9	15	13	2	8
Total	Billington	159	29	25	36	17	11	19
	Coverland	138	22	34	48	32	15	37
	Total	297	51	59	84	49	26	56

\*Key: Q = questioning, Aff = affirming, Ord = ordering,  
St = stating, Ex = explaining, Pr = praising, Ant = anticipating

### Table Thirty Five: Distribution of strategies

Looking at the distribution of strategies observed for the different contexts, it can be seen that Mrs Devlin at Coverland School used more statements and explanations while reading to the class whereas Mrs Harris just used questions.

It can be seen from the analysis above that the teachers were largely similar in the aspects of literacy that they covered and in the strategies they employed in their teaching. Differences between the teachers observed lay in the amount of emphasis they put on the various aspects of literacy.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have presented the data resulting from the two parts of the research. I have also tried to show how these data were derived from my observations and the interviews with the teachers. I have given an impressionistic account of my deductions from these. I have also tried to make this more objective by introducing a form of quantitative analysis. I have tried to keep the discussion of each element to a minimum in this chapter. However, I have included some reflection, particularly where findings from the first part of the study influenced the procedure in the second part. I have also attempted to give the reader a flavour of how the findings emerged from the data and why I analysed the data in the ways I did. This presentation of the data has also given me the opportunity to consider the differences and similarities between teachers.

In the next chapter I want to look at what the findings might tell us about the teacher of reading in the child's first year of school.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TEACHING READING IN THE FIRST YEAR OF SCHOOL

#### Introduction

The inevitable question that arises from the collection of data presented in the previous chapter is 'so what?' What can we deduce from the study of these teachers about how teachers go about the initial teaching of reading? One of the premises from which this study started was that 'method', although widely used, was an inadequate descriptor for what happens in classrooms. Indeed, not one of the teachers adhered strictly to a particular method, but all stressed the importance of a full range of learning associated with reading: phonics, sight vocabulary, understanding, enjoyment and so on. However, the term eclectic, as used by HMI, did not seem to be appropriate either. Describing teachers as picking from a variety of methods implies time spent employing the different methods advocated by the various approaches. Yet this was not the case. Very little teacher time was spent in direct instruction of aspects of literacy. Rather teacher time was spent interacting with individuals or groups of children.

In the discussion of the importance, or otherwise, of these findings, I intend to concentrate on the data from the second part of the study. This is the part of the research where I feel I have begun to gain some insight into what the teacher is doing. The first part was primarily influential in the development of the design and focus of the second part. However, where the data from the first part can shed further light on the findings from the second part, I shall refer back to it. It was fortunate that I kept sufficiently detailed field notes during the first part that I have been able to refer back to these in the light of analysis of the data from the second part.



I shall start by looking at what my research tells us about these teachers teaching reading to children in their first year of school, then I shall examine what I have learned about research into teaching reading. Finally, I shall consider to what extent I can claim validity and generalisability for this research.

### **Teacher Activity during the Teaching of Reading**

On my classroom visits in the spring term of 1992 I had followed observation schedules which related to task analysis, teacher role and planned teacher intervention. These were based on previous research (Bennett et al. 1984, Bennett and Kell 1989) and my own earlier observation in the classrooms. The findings show that the activities provided by teachers were largely similar in that they included some work-sheet work on aspects of literacy such as handwriting, phonics and so on and some free writing mostly from stories that had been read to the children or from their own experience. It was unusual for these to be preceded by any sustained input about what was to be learned. However, children were usually told the purpose (cognitive outcome) of the activity. There were instances of the teacher explicitly addressing aspects of literacy but these were not a major part of what the teacher did.

The analysis of the teachers' roles and record of planned teacher intervention was what really interested me when I gathered the data together. Throughout the observations I had become increasingly aware of how little 'teaching' (i.e. what I have labelled instructing for the purposes of this study) teachers did in relation to literacy. This was confirmed by the data, though to different degrees according to which teacher was being studied. This made me want to look more closely at the

teacher in her monitoring role which in each case was the one she adopted most often. It seemed that task analysis was not revealing any more about classroom practice in the teaching of initial reading than had previous studies of children and texts. Similarly an analysis of the planned intervention in literacy learning on the part of the teacher had not shown much that was not already known, except perhaps to underline how little was actually undertaken in the form of planned input.

This raises the question of what do I actually mean by 'teaching' ? When I say above that I became aware of how little 'teaching' teachers actually did, I seem to be referring to a transmission model of teaching. That is one in which the teacher passes over to children the knowledge she has about the subject. Whilst teachers were clearly concerned that children made progress in reading, the data here seem to imply that these teachers do not use what might be considered the traditional medium of lessons during which this knowledge is transferred to enable children to progress. Neither does the data from the first part of the study and from Bennett et al. (1984) appear to reveal a great deal of potential learning covered by the tasks that teachers give to children. According to Bennett et al. these tasks are often characterised by poor match, limited opportunities for learning and a narrow range of learning addressed. My own data showed literacy tasks to cover a range of writing activities but, although cognitive outcomes were stressed more than in the Bennett et al. study, other indicators of effective practice were less evident. Also the tasks were clearly presented as writing tasks, although aspects of reading were involved as in, for example, the completion of a phonic work sheet. Yet most teachers do enjoy a large measure of success in helping children learn to read despite the inevitable concern about those who fail.



In the second part of the study I wanted to look again at the contexts in which literacy was addressed in the classroom. On examining the data from the specimen descriptions, I identified five different types of interactional context in which teachers worked on aspects of literacy (reading to the class, leading discussion, monitoring, working with a group, hearing readers). These five contexts illustrate a greater range of teacher activity while engaged in the teaching of reading than is implied by a focus on task design and planned instruction. These contexts were similar to the sort of contexts I had observed in the first part of the study but they were categorised in a different way. This was found to be more useful for the purpose of analysis than the predetermined roles (such as supervisor, monitor, model etc., see pages 93) of the first part. The notion of roles, or at least the labels I had given to them, did not seem to describe adequately what the teacher was doing as she appeared to spend most of her time monitoring or supervising. The contexts identified in the second part describe the teachers' practice more effectively and provide a platform for further analysis of what the teachers did in these contexts. These contexts provide a more effective description because they describe what the teacher is doing rather than trying to fit the teacher's action into a predetermined role as I had done in the first part of the study. In this I had, in other words, looked to see when the teacher was doing what I, the researcher, expected her to be doing.

The lack of pre-planned, direct instruction raises the question of how do teachers teach reading if not with planned input? The teachers in the second part of the study had an initial plan of what they were going to be doing during the day, i.e. the contexts in which they would cover aspects of literacy. Having made these decisions the actual interaction within those contexts involved response or reaction to what arose. The answer seems to be that the teachers I observed were reacting to children and



situations rather than being proactive as a planned programme of work would imply.

On my second visit to Mrs Harris' classroom I asked if the morning had gone as planned. She replied, 'I don't think you can ever expect anything to go as planned on the second day in with new children - more or less - I knew I didn't have very much time, I did go off at tangents but I expect to go off at a tangent I'

When asked where she went off at a tangent she said,

To start with the most obvious one: the writing lists of names for the crane (a child had asked if he could go on a toy crane and Mrs Harris had suggested they make a rota) - I hadn't planned to do that - but I think that we take opportunities don't we. It was sort of in the plan - I knew I was going to see who was going to write their own name - that was one of the things I was going to do and I was going to make an opportunity to do it - so one arose..... (Billington 6.5.93 ll. 5-10).

This arose from the context of children working within a group on a weighing activity. Another example of the teacher having an activity in mind and introducing it at a time that seemed appropriate to her was when Mrs Devlin introduced the label for the 'leader' (7.5.93). It had not been planned for that day but was something she would often do and that she decided to do on that day in the 'hustle and bustle' of lining up. This label was used later in the day to reinforce word recognition and word by word reading.

With this in mind it was interesting to re-examine the data from the first part of the study to consider how much time the teacher spent in reactive roles as opposed to proactive ones. I looked again at each of the roles and considered in which the teacher was being reactive and in which proactive.

Proactive roles would seem to be:

**Manager:** where the teacher is concerned with the organisation of learning, for example giving instructions, explanations and so on;

**Model:** where the teacher is reading or writing in front of children;

**Instructor:** teaching a specific point but not hearing readers as here the teacher listens to the child and reacts to how the child reads;

**Assessor:** as this is usually a situation where the teacher will set up an activity and then *not* react to it as she wants to see what the child can do alone.

Reactive roles would seem to be:

**Facilitator:** as the teacher here sets up a context and then reacts to the children as she judges appropriate;

**Monitor:** where the teacher is reacting on an individual basis to children while they work;

**Instructor:** when this is hearing readers for the reasons given above.

The role of supervisor has mainly been omitted from this description as the nature of the role meant that it was not usually concerned with literacy. It most commonly occurred, on the one hand, when teachers were taking the register, giving notices and so on and on the other, reacting to non cognitive issues while overseeing the class, for example while children were changing for PE. The only exception to this was when Mrs Corby took the register she allowed children to keep their own registers and would sometimes comment to them about what they, or she, were doing. Therefore this time has been counted in with the role of facilitator for the purpose of this analysis.

School	Reactive roles		Proactive roles	
	minutes	%	minutes	%
Granville	351	63%	206	37%
Yelland	477	82%	107	18%
Redgate	469	70%	203	30%

**Table Thirty Six: Reactive and proactive roles - overall**

School	Reactive roles		Proactive roles	
	minutes	%	minutes	%
Granville	196	79%	51	21%
Yelland	329	89%	39	11%
Redgate	298	78%	85	22%

**Table Thirty Seven: Reactive and proactive roles - literacy activity**

Tables Thirty Six and Thirty Seven show in tabular form the results of looking at teacher role in this way. Two interesting things arise from this. One is that the teachers do now seem to have much more in common and the big disparity in the amount of, so-called, actual 'teaching' undertaken has gone. This seems to be because the effect of the hearing of readers being counted on the one hand as instruction and on the other (when part of monitoring the class) as monitoring. Secondly all three teachers do spend considerably more time in reactive roles, particularly when they are addressing aspects of literacy. This broader sweep of analysis, looking at the two aspects of teacher role seems to come much closer to a model of what happens in classrooms.

The data from the second part of the study provide us with some more information about the nature of this reaction within one of the contexts, that of the teacher



monitoring. Here I had identified seven possible reasons for a teacher to respond to a child. The distribution of reasons for a teacher responding to a child can be studied in Table Thirty Two on page 172. About half of the responses were child initiated, in other words the child approached the teacher, and the other half were teacher initiated. However, even those that were teacher initiated appeared to be as a result of the teacher reacting to what the child had done (usually written) or not done. As, for example, in the following:

Child	Reason	Teacher response
	E	Can you use a writing pencil for your writing <i>Lots of positive comment: that's lovely, you're getting good, you're getting clever</i>
R.	E	<i>Helps to find page - you did that beautifully there (previous page)</i>
J.	E	Well done that's really good
I'll do my name first		That's right then we are ready to write I'm going to clean my board because it says Tuesday and it's Wednesday
It's Wednesday		L. you had a book about shoes last night
L. gets book		<i>Teacher shows to group - looks at 's' to group: Put your finger where we're going to the writing - point - now watch see what I'm going to do. I'm going to go round and round see if you can make a pattern like that all the way along. It's easy for S., he's done this before.</i>
so have I		You've got one at the beginning of S...
	E	<i>holds C.'s hand while she writes</i>
	E	<i>holds J.'s hand while he writes</i>

(Coverland 19.5.93 II. 131-150)

Here Mrs Devlin spoke to the children in the group, commenting on what she saw they were doing or heard them say. In order to examine the idea of the teacher being more reactive than proactive in the teaching of reading I need to consider more closely the nature of that which is to be learned and how the ways in which teachers work may contribute to this.

### **The Teaching of Reading**

I tried to explain at the start of this dissertation what I meant by the term reading. I stated that I was not just interested in decoding print but also in children's ability to understand and respond to text. This implies a process that is not readily transmitted to the learner. It implies the need for the active engagement of the child in the text. Whereas it may be possible to instruct a learner in the so called skills and conventions of written language, for me, this is limited without the individual's interpretation and response to that text.

The variety of contexts in which the teachers in the second part of my study addressed literacy appeared to provide opportunities for all three of these facets of reading to be covered. Although there were some differences between the two teachers, it can be seen from Table Thirty Three on page 174 that both teachers addressed all three. The aspects of literacy that were of interest to teachers can be examined by looking at the concerns they raised in the interviews and by analysing their responses to children.

### Cognitive concerns

Although several concerns were identified, the most important one for the two teachers appeared to be cognitive. They consistently referred to this area more than the other areas identified. However, this is not surprising when the subject of research was known to be cognitive and my questions have been shown to be leading in this direction when they were not open. The aspects of literacy referred to in the interviews were many; in fact thirty different aspects were mentioned (see Table Thirteen on page 146). Some of these were referred to frequently and others less so.



For example, word recognition was referred to nine times whereas rhyme was only mentioned twice. This was also reflected by my own observations in which responses relating to word recognition appeared twenty four times and to rhyme only once. Although a study of how teachers dealt with each specific aspect of literacy would be interesting it is not within the scope of this study. Here my interest is more with the fact that teachers were referring to a range of different aspects of literacy.

It is also interesting that the three aspects of skills, response and comprehension were distributed throughout the range of activities that teachers undertook in the classroom. From Table Thirty Four (on page 175) it can be seen that in the interviews both teachers referred to skills most frequently with comprehension being the next most frequently referred to aspect, and response the least. This also shows that, on average, I observed skills being covered most frequently in the responses teachers gave to children in the classroom. However, Mrs Devlin was less consistent than Mrs Harris in what she spoke about in the interviews and her responses to children. In fact Mrs Devlin was observed to respond more to children about comprehension than about skills.

Looking at the breakdown of the different types of teacher activity (Table Thirty Three, page 174) it can be seen that both teachers referred to skills most in the contexts of working with a group and monitoring. Since these contexts were the times when children were undertaking prescribed tasks this occurred mostly when children were writing. Moreover, when the teacher was working with a group she was often explaining activities. Here both teachers focused extensively on skills, again in the context of writing. Comprehension and meaning took greater precedence when the teacher was engaged in reading to the class or hearing readers. Response to



literacy was referred to more during teacher led discussion.

This coverage of a wide range of aspects of literacy is interesting to me in the light of the discussions about the teaching of reading which relate method to a more narrow range of skills, as, for example phonics or word recognition. Nor is there any evidence that skills have been abandoned in favour of enjoyment or comprehension as inferred from the use of 'Real Books'. All these aspects were present both in teachers minds and in their actions in the classroom. What this research does not do, however, is to show the impact of these responses on individual children's learning.

In the first part of the study the questionnaires and interviews appeared to show an importance attributed to teaching of aspects of literacy by the teachers which had not been evident in the task and role analysis. There seem to be two possible reasons for this. One being that the teachers were either lying or misleading themselves about what they were doing or secondly that they do not see themselves as teaching literacy primarily through tasks. It is interesting to consider this in the light of the criticism Bennett et al. (1984) and Bennett and Kell (1989) make that teachers rush to respond to children which results in the teachers focusing on procedural rather than cognitive aims. Examining the responses that teachers made in this study it can be seen that very often they did repeat or affirm a procedure but it seemed to me that this was done in order to engage the child and to reinforce the correct behaviour. For example, when hearing a child read Mrs Harris said, 'That's right you went to the top of the page'. (Billington 6.5.93 l.1) Bennett et al. (1984) report that most of the literacy related interactions between teacher and children were concerned with spelling. Although in the present study there were some interactions about spelling, these were in only two of the five contexts identified

(teacher working with a group and teacher monitoring) and even here many responses were related to the conventions of written language and the meaning of the text.

A second point that emerged is the way these teachers placed cognitive and affective concerns alongside each other. Some of the aims that teachers referred to in the interviews at the end of the first part of the study could not be achieved by the sort of short 'input' which is often implied by the term 'lesson' or the activity of 'teaching'. For example Mrs Gilbertson gave as those aspects of reading that she thought most important as 'phonics, enjoyment of books and confidence' (Interview July 1992). When asked how they taught those aspects of reading that they thought most important teachers described a mixture of approaches. For example Mrs Corby cited 'encouragement, for example choosing a book as an extra treat, Breakthrough to Literacy work and work sheets, choosing a sound for the week, handwriting practice and group activities' (Interview July 1992). Similarly what they cited as the most important thing that they did to enable children to learn to read were those ongoing experiences that build up attitudes as well as skills. For example, Mrs Somerton listed the sharing of books, developing a child's sense of authorship, developing a sense of value and love of books and letting children see the teacher read. These affective concerns were evident in the interviews with teachers in the second part of the study. Perhaps also, there is not so much a mismatch between teachers' aims and what they actually do as an inappropriate approach to research into this. I shall return to this in the second part of this chapter.

### Affective, social and managerial concerns

When teachers in the second part of the study were interviewed after the observation



sessions, they raised other areas of concern as well as cognitive. This was not something I had expected, although perhaps with my own experience as a teacher I should have done. These references to the other concerns are all the more powerful when it is considered that my questions were not leading in this way. These concerns related to affective, social and managerial issues. This relates to other research that has been done into teacher thinking where teachers have been shown to want to maintain the status quo in their classrooms (e.g. Brown and McIntyre 1993). A possible difference here with these teachers whose pupils were in their first year of schooling is that these teachers were concerned with *developing* the type of behaviour that they wanted rather than maintaining the status quo. Indeed there also appeared to be an expectation that appropriate behaviour was not always possible.

The affective and social concerns voiced by the teachers of the youngest children in school were identified earlier by McLeod (1981, in Clark and Peterson 1986). She found that 35% of Kindergarten teachers' intended learning outcomes were social or affective against 57.7% cognitive and 7.2% psychomotor/perceptual. The two teachers in my study seemed concerned by two aspects: one the motivation of the children and secondly the socialisation of children into the way of the classroom. Teachers' affective concerns related to children's perceived emotional state, their attitude to books and learning and their motivation. The social concerns considered the children's group experience, getting along with others; the development of a routine into which the children could fit; the development of independence and autonomy; and the children's behaviour.

The social concerns themselves are interesting in that they could be seen to be contradictory. The two teachers were concerned to socialise children into the life of



the classroom wanting them to develop cooperation, fit into routines and to behave in an appropriate way. They also stated that they were concerned to develop autonomy and independence - two attributes that do not always sit easily with routine and good classroom behaviour. Indeed it could be said that young children's independence of thinking (in other words, thinking that is not always in tune with the teachers') is what is deemed to be lack of good behaviour in the classroom. However, it is not the purpose of this study to go in more depth into this aspect of the teachers' thinking. It is important to note that these matters were of concern to these teachers while they were teaching reading.

Studies of teachers' decision making have shown that teachers appear to make decisions in the classroom on the basis of their judgements about how well the lesson is going (Clark and Peterson 1986). Brown and McIntyre (1993) identified two broad types of goal that teachers used to evaluate their teaching: the most important of these was 'normal desirable states of pupil activity' and the second goal was identified as 'progress' (p. 67).

Although the research here was not concerned with decision making, it became evident that this area of research shed some light on what I had observed. I did not feel that the teachers I observed made their responses according to a perceived gap between what they expected and what they saw. Rather I felt that they *expected* that there would be difficulties and their responses were designed to avoid these and to train children to fit into their expected behaviour pattern. The difference is subtle and perhaps better explained by an example. I asked Mrs Devlin what went on in her mind while she was hearing readers and other children needed attention. She replied,

We'd got it sorted last term, the children had the message that if someone was reading then they just had to wait and it was a small enough group that

they didn't have to wait too long. I'd like to give the same messages again this term so that if a child is reading with me then they need to wait and if they can't wait then they have to go and get on themselves - have a go. I don't like to be interrupted if at all possible but it's very difficult when D. says 'Teacher, Teacher' (Coverland 7.5.93 ll. 83-91).

Here Mrs Devlin showed that, although she had a strategy for developing appropriate behaviour while she was hearing readers, she still expected some children not yet to conform to this and would deal with these individuals. I had observed Mrs Harris in a session with the whole class where they were reading a large label that was to be placed over the play area that had recently been turned into a space ship. She asked children, apparently at random, to name and say the sound of some of the letters on the label. When I asked why she had chosen a particular child to identify the letter 'r', she replied, ' Because, although he seems bright and on the ball I've found that he doesn't actually know all the letters quite and I thought he knew the ones of his name and I thought that was one that I was going to be able to reinforce and he was going to get'. I had noticed at the time that he was fidgeting with the child next to him so asked, 'I wondered whether it was a discipline thing ?' She replied, 'That as well because he was wriggling wasn't he and it was a way of drawing him in - but that was why I chose that letter.' (Billington 20.5.93 ll. 31-38)

This presents a picture of these teachers operating in a complex way. Their responses to children appear to be governed, not only by a concern for cognitive development, but also by how the children are learning to fit into the classroom and how they are feeling about learning itself. This appears to present the teachers with managerial dilemmas that are also constantly a matter of concern. With this in mind I was interested to examine the strategies that teachers used in their interactions with children.



### **Teacher Strategies during the Teaching of Reading**

Fifteen different strategies were observed to be employed by the teachers while they were engaged in the five different types of interaction (See Table Twenty Eight, page 165). The seven most common types of response observed: questions, statements, imperative, anticipation, affirmation, explanation and praise do not seem unusual responses for a classroom. What is surprising is the distribution of these strategies. Questions represented 41% of the responses recorded. Statements were the next most used strategy but represented only 12% of all the responses. This break down of the responses used by these two teachers seems very unrepresentative of normal speech or even what might be expected in a classroom.

Wells (1987) comments unfavourably on teachers' use of questioning describing the larger proportion as 'display questions' in which the teacher usually knows the answer. This was certainly the case in the interactions I observed. Wells reports that the high proportion of questions asked and requests made by teachers of children results in children being reduced to the passive role of respondent. However, it is possible to look at what the teacher is doing from a different perspective. Looking back at how the teachers used the strategies there appeared to be an attempt to *actively* engage the children in the literacy activity.

Many of the questions I observed did not appear to be posed in a conventional way. Often one question would follow another without any apparent expectation of an answer. The questions appeared to me to be a way of engaging the child or children in the activity. For example, when Mrs Harris was reading to the class she interspersed the reading with questions. When talking about this afterwards she explained that her intentions for the reading of the story were to focus the children



on certain aspects of the text. The children were already familiar with the book and it was not being read for the story content. Mrs Harris uses the following questions (full record can be seen in Appendix Seven):

Do you remember what we call these ?

What page is this ?

You think it should be number 0 ?

How do we know it is paddled ?

Does it say 'said' ?

Is he enjoying it ?

Do you notice anything about these words ?

What do you think they are going to do now ?

(Billington 30.4.93)

When talking about it afterwards she mentioned the different aspects she hoped to cover and the different children she had in mind. These questions were posed in the context of the children reading along with the teacher so that the questions became a means of focusing children on aspects of the text and of stimulating their active involvement.

Questions were also used when interacting with individuals while monitoring. For example Mrs Devlin used questioning to alert a child to an error (he had written his name upside down): 'What's wrong there ? What's wrong ?' Also questions were used to focus the same child on the meaning of his writing (about a flying pizza): 'How did it get up there ? Which bit of the story shall I write down ? What sort of pizzas do you like ?' (Coverland 7.5.93 ll. 52-54, 93 - 101).

Mrs Devlin talked about this afterwards:

*Can you remember M.'s writing about the flying pizzas ? Did you have any particular thoughts about that ?*

I wanted him to feel that, yes, he had made a story. I didn't actually expect him to have a go at writing but it was a story and I wanted him to tell me the bit of it that he would like me to write down and I was happy that he was watching while I was actually writing and he tried really hard with his name for a child that came in having no idea about writing at all, pencils and paper

*Because he had his book upside down ?*

Yes he's come a long way, actually.

*You finished up by saying what sort of pizzas do you like ?*

*What was your thinking there ?*

Again pictures have not had a lot of detail but they are coming and you could actually see the shape of something there - a few yellow dots - his colours are still not very sure there were yellow things and I wondered if there were any red tomatoes - so I suppose all sorts of things in there. I really wanted him to feel he had made a story.

(Coverland 7.5.93 ll. 63-76)

Although many of these questions could be described as the 'display questions' which Wells criticises, they also seem to have the function of involving the child actively in the literacy interaction. If these questions were changed to statements, then the criticism could certainly be made that the child was reduced to a passive role. This is not to refute Wells' argument. His examples are compelling and do show children reduced to a passive role in many interactions. However, in the case of these teachers and these young children the teacher did seem to be using questions to engage children in the activity. What this research did not examine was how successful these teachers were at engaging children through these strategies. Although this was not studied, both teachers were selected as being ones who were generally considered to be successful in starting children off in learning to read therefore, maybe the assumption can be made that they had some success in this area.

It may be that there are two (at least) kinds of questions in classrooms: the ones that play a part in teacher-child interaction and others that are a teaching strategy. Wood (1986) also criticised teachers use of questioning and considered teacher



questions to be largely an exercise in control. He recognised that, given the large number of children in a classroom, promoting and sustaining productive encounters with children is difficult. Management of time, resources and so on assume considerable importance.

He acknowledged that questioning *may* be seen as a tactic designed to engage children actively in the teaching-learning process, but he argued that the strategy is counter-productive as questions that ask a child to 'display' knowledge allow no scope for negotiation of understanding. In fact, where teachers ask more questions the less children contribute (Wood and Wood 1983). However, although this argument seems to refute my interpretation that these teachers used questioning to engage children in the learning, it supports my earlier comment that 'interaction' between teacher and child is not an appropriate term for what I observed. I chose the term 'response' to describe the teachers' utterances. Indeed, I saw no evidence of the teachers wanting an answer to most of their questions. Here I would agree with Wood that this was a largely managerial or control factor: answers to the volume of questions posed would have been unmanageable.

Wood considers strategies to enable children to answer the questions: more time, more open-ended questions etc. I would argue that these would have been inappropriate in the contexts I observed where there was a high proportion of children to one adult and sustained interaction was not allowed for. Yet Wood did allow (Wood and Wood 1983) that where teachers offered contributions that were high in level of presentation, children were likely to respond in kind.

Where teachers, in one sense, answer their own questions to provide possible answers, opinions and so on, children as young as four years of age reciprocate by adopting a similar cognitive-linguistic stance and remain relatively active and forthcoming at the same time (Wood 1986, p. 210).



For example, in the following extract the teacher's questions did not seem to require an answer, if one was given it was accepted, if not the teacher answered or moved on with a suggestions or another question.

<b>Child</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
	The very last book I chose ( <i>shows</i> ) have you seen one that looks a bit like that ?
Where's the baby Pat Hutchins	Yes, who is the author ? It's a new book. Would you like to see another one ? This is one we have read but we haven't got in our class. Do you remember we saw this story on Words and Pictures ? Do you know who this is ? What kind of a girl do you think this is ?
Grumpy	Yes - it's Grumpy Nicola. <i>Tells about girl at the library being called Nicola and not liking books about nasty Nicolas.</i> Aren't we going to have fun reading these books ? This one - I just loved the picture on the front of this one - Owl Babies. There's a bit on the back that tells you about this story. What is this story going to be about ? What do you think might happen in this story?
A fox might come fly away call mother indistinct	<i>repeats 'a fox might come'</i> What would happen if a fox comes ? <i>accepts</i> <i>accepts</i> <i>accepts</i> One more ( <i>shows back of book</i> ) Is that the front ?

(Billington 14.5.93 II. 102-125)

Here the questions appear to have a different function from either expecting children to display knowledge or to hear individual opinions, rather, I suggest, the teachers were attempting to raise ideas, focus on aspects of literacy and engage children's attention. Also the interaction, such as it was, was between teacher and *children* rather than teacher and *child*. Unfortunately, as this aspect of teacher behaviour did not become evident until after the end of the field work, it was not possible to discuss any opinions with the teachers. It would be an area that any further study would need to address.

Teachers also appeared to use other strategies to engage children in literacy interactions. The use of imperative, at times, demonstrated the same thing. Although some of the uses of the imperative were straight commands such as 'put your books away,' it was also sometimes used in such a way as to involve the child. For example:

Put your finger on the word which is 'dinosaur' (Billington 20.5.93).

You write a lovely 'Friday' (Billington 14.5.93)

Whenever you see a number '3', put up your hand (Coverland 25.5.93).

Put your finger on the word that says 'big' (Coverland 25.5.93).

Mrs Harris reads, 'Nicola makes a silly face', then says to class, 'You make a silly face' (Billington 14.5.93)

Anticipation is used in the same way. Both teachers used anticipation apparently to point to activities that were going to happen and to try to stimulate children's interest. Many of the statements that I categorised as using the strategy of anticipation started with 'Let's ...' 'Let's read this book', 'Let's look in the dictionary'. Another use for anticipation was as an 'advance organiser' (Bennett and Kell 1989): 'I'm going to tell you a funny newspaper story about the queen forgetting her glasses' (Coverland 12.5.93). It was also used as a way of developing routines in the classroom: 'We'll do that again tomorrow'.

Affirmation was also used relatively frequently. Here the teacher responded to something a child said or did in a positive way. This was usually in response to something the child had said or done correctly, but could also be in response to an incorrect answer. For example, Mrs Harris pointed to the word Titch and a child read 'Tom', she responded, 'It starts like Tom' (Billington 25.5.93). Sometimes the affirmation would be simply 'That's right' and on other occasions the teacher would



use the opportunity to repeat a correct answer, for example, 'You've found the 'd' for dinosaur'.

### **Home to School**

One of the first impressions I gained in the two classrooms was of the way in which teachers could be said to be employing strategies that helped children to make the transfer from home to school learning. Although this was not strictly related to the teaching of reading, it seemed to me to be important to look through the data in the light of this impression. Criticism has been made of classrooms as places for learning in contrast to the home (Tizard and Hughes 1984, Juleibo 1985, Wells 1987). Criticism has also been made of teachers' management of learning (Bennett et al. 1984, Bennett and Kell 1989). Therefore an aspect that may explain teachers' action in some way is of relevance to their teaching, including the teaching of reading.

Wells (1987) considers schools as environments for learning in the following way.

The first and most obvious cause of the impoverished interaction that so often occurs between teachers and pupils is the number of children involved - 30 or more in the average class, with only a single adult. All of these children have to be kept profitably occupied on tasks that stimulate their interest and promote their learning. The demands on teachers in terms of management, safety, and control are therefore enormous, so it is not surprising to find that there is little sustained interaction. Added to this, at the outset, is the inexperience of children entering school for the first time. They have to learn to behave according to the norms of the classroom, wait while others take their conversational turns, and discuss the shared topic rather than changing the subject at will. The classroom thus suffers from organisational problems that can militate against children's spontaneity and restrict the opportunities for sustained adult-child interaction of the kind experienced in many homes. (p. 116)

It is not the purpose of this study to examine the interactive opportunities for children in the classroom, and certainly there was little evidence of sustained interaction. I intend to look at the responses of the teacher while she interacted with



the children about literacy. The teachers in this study showed themselves to be very aware of the organisational problems of the classroom and it is interesting to consider what they may have been doing to overcome the particular difficulties of children starting school.

Ease of transition from learning in the home to learning at school can be seen as one aspect where these teachers adopted strategies which went some way towards assisting the child in this transition. Evidence from this very small study shows that teachers in reception classes can adopt strategies that compensate for the differences in the learning context between home and school. There was, however, no evidence from interviews with teachers that they had this as a conscious intention.

The examples given below are not isolated ones but chosen from many similar in order to illustrate the point being made.

### Teacher initiation of learning

Wells indicates how a great deal of the learning in the home takes place within an interaction initiated by the child. Obviously with a large class and specific aspects of curriculum to cover this cannot be possible. However, the teachers in this study had strategies they employed to engage the children's interest.

For example, Mrs Harris would often use suspense as a way of gaining the children's attention. On one occasion, with the whole class on the carpet and a large closed cardboard box in front of her, she started to tell a story about what she had done after school the previous evening which led to her going to the schools' library service and choosing some new books. Another morning there was a letter pinned to the easel

addressed to the class. There was much speculation about what it could contain before it was opened to reveal a letter asking for details about a favourite television programme which introduced the writing activity for the morning.

In another way many ideas were thrown into discussion, apparently haphazardly, but with the intention that for some children these might provide a springboard for further investigation. For example at the end of a reading of *Each Peach Pear Plum* (Ahlberg 1978), a child asked Mrs Devlin where Robin Hood was in the picture and she replied 'I can see him, see if you can find him later'. Talking about this later she said,

I thought maybe she would go back and look as she in fact did. It's a small book to use in the class and I wouldn't particularly want everybody clamouring around the pictures. The pictures are so clever the way they are made they are so beautifully illustrated, so the more you look the more you see. (Coverland 29.4.93 ll. 37-44).

### Frame of reference

Not only is the learning in the home initiated by the child but the adult is able to scaffold that learning supporting the child in the next step. An important part of doing this is the ability to place the learning within the child's frame of reference. The parent is in an ideal position to do this since he or she shares the experience of the child and can refer forward or back as appropriate. This is obviously much harder for classteachers. Whilst they may know something of the child's life out of school they cannot know everything and they also cannot relate to thirty different frames of reference all at the same time. However, both teachers had strategies for coping with this situation. They would often break in during storytime to ask whether children had had experience of something that was referred to in the story; for example, a bus journey where those who had not been on a bus were reminded

about watching a bus going past the school.

The same thing happened on a one to one basis, particularly when the teacher was sharing a book with a child. When J. met the word 'parade' in his reading book, Mrs Harris asked him if he had ever been to a parade. When he said that he had not she probed until she could find some meeting of his experience with the idea of a parade, and asked, 'Have you ever been to the carnival in ..... (names neighbouring large town) ? Have you ever been to a fancy dress party ? You like dressing up don't you, J. ? Well if we had a parade in the village people would dress up and .....

She goes on to explain a parade. Afterwards Mrs Harris said,

'Well I think I was trying to bring it to the child's experience, it's exploring it a little bit. It (lack of understanding) detracts from the understanding of the text ..... I was just checking it out - just seeing where he was at' (Billington 6.5.93 Observation II. 46-51, Interview II. 74-76).

Both teachers did this frequently in relation to text. They were constantly relating text to life, life to text and text to text. The first two of these interactional sequences are as referred to by Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1984).

#### *Text to life*

When B. was reading a story in which a dog appears, Mrs Devlin interrupted to ask him whether he had a dog at home. (Coverland 12.5.93)

#### *Life to text*

Mrs Harris was reading some poems from a new poetry book and said, 'You might guess why I'm reading this next poem, it's about a girl who likes mud. The children



knew immediately as there was a new classroom being built outside their window and they had been watching a digger working in the mud the day before. (Billington 20.5.93)

### *Text to text*

When Mrs Devlin was reading 'Tidy Titch' (Hutchins 1991) she first talked about the nickname Titch and related it to the names, Biff, Chip and Kipper in the Oxford Reading Tree books. She also drew the children's attention to the author and reminded them that they had recently had Rosie's Walk by the same author (Hutchins 1968) read to them. (Coverland 25.5.93)

### Routines and formats

Another key feature of learning in the home is the existence of routines that provide a basis for many interactional opportunities. Both teachers were keen to establish routines early on in the term with the new children. These appeared to have both a cognitive and social purpose. Bruner (1977) believes that for learning to take place appropriate social interactional frameworks must be provided - he referred to these as 'scaffolding'. Thus the parent provides contexts and routines that are familiar to the child, he or she is finely tuned to the capabilities and capacities of the child and helps him or her to develop within the supporting framework provided.

Mrs Devlin always chose a child to be the 'leader', for the day. The 'leader' was the person who took the register to the office, stood in front of the line to go to dinner etc. This clearly had an important social function in maintaining an order within the classroom, but it was also used to illustrate a use of literacy. Each day a label was made saying who was to be the leader. At first the label was made by the class

teacher but gradually the children themselves were encouraged to make their own labels. These labels were also used for reading practice at times when the children were lining up near to the sign. When the formation of routines was discussed with Mrs Devlin she stressed the importance of establishing these and said,

Once they are aware of it most children enjoy it. It's security but you can see the development. This morning was the first time they had made their own notices about who is the leader. Thinking about it last night (I thought that) hopefully they will see what's going on and do that without me having to say. That will be all part of being the leader, that you make the poster to let everybody know. (Coverland 19.5.93 ll. 1-8)

And also, on another day,

There's always a lot of hustle and bustle about who's going to be the leader, who's going to be first in line. I put that (a sign) there and throughout the day I will say many times 'N.... is our leader today'. I do make sure we use the words that are actually written there and hopefully they will recognise the words (Coverland 7.5.93 ll. 13-19).

### Attitudes

Children grow up in an environment where those people close to them are constantly displaying attitudes and giving opinions which become for the child an accepted way of responding. Children are not *told* to like the family dog or support Manchester United so much as absorb these attitudes as taken for granted until further experience leads them to question. Whilst many children will come to school with a positive attitude to books and reading, others may either have no really strong feelings or think of books as being to do with learning to read as an end in itself. Both teachers worked hard to establish positive attitudes to books and reading through what they said, the way they said it and the way they reacted to children's reading or treatment of books.

When introducing some new books collected from the school's library service, Mrs Harris emphasised the 'beautiful' books and talked about the 'fun' they would have



reading them. Afterwards she said, 'I thought how gorgeous these books are and aren't these children lucky to have such beautiful books and I do want them to like them too.' (Billington 14.5.93 ll. 69-71, see also p. 196).

### Feedback

Juleibo (1985) reports that in the home constant feedback was given to encourage a sense of success, whereas, at school errors were often corrected without explanation. This did not seem to be the case with the two teachers observed here, feedback was given in a positive way where the teachers felt it was appropriate or often errors were left uncommented upon and something good was chosen for comment. Both teachers were asked whether they criticised children's reading or writing. Mrs Harris said,

I try to do this more by encouragement than criticism, you have to think what's appropriate for this age group. I do criticise just occasionally and I can tell you the two it would have been this morning ..... . A. is the type of child who I'd not criticise, but put it beforehand (saying) I would like you to do it as a special bit of writing and I want you to concentrate on this, that or the other and then if she didn't deliver the goods I would say 'are you satisfied with that?' (Billington 14.5.93 ll. 26-29, 35-39).

Mrs Devlin commented,

(I criticise) writing rather than reading. I do criticise work that we actually record in our books if I feel it's appropriate. M. responds well ..... he will go back and have another go. It wouldn't be worth criticising at the moment J. or Mi. - I wouldn't use that approach with them as yet (Coverland 19.5.93 ll. 28-30, 41-44).

### Appropriateness to the individual child

This theme of appropriateness to the individual child is one that recurs many times. Although this was not necessarily apparent in the observations, it was striking how often in the post observation interview the matching of response to child was mentioned. This occurred in a variety of different ways. Sometimes it was, as above,



when the type of response was as deemed appropriate to the child, other times it was the content of the response. An example of this which goes some way to demonstrate the multidimensionality of the teacher's behaviour is quoted above when Mrs Harris is talking about asking a child about the letter 'r' (see page 192).

Mrs Devlin explained how she had different expectations for different children at different times. Here she is describing her expectations of two girls in a writing group,

K. and Je. were very happy to go on and write on their own today, they're not terribly confident usually..... yesterday they worked very closely with me on letter shapes and looking at words and actually writing words down - so I suppose I just wanted to see what they could do by themselves. To give them a bit of confidence that 'yes I can write like this'. Je. and K. were quite pleased with what they did in the end and it was lovely (Coverland 7.5.93 ll. 35-43).

This is particularly interesting when placed alongside the criticisms made by Bennett et al. (1984) about teachers' poor diagnostic skills. Bennett was referring to task design where, as the first part of my study also showed, tasks were more often for practice than teachers thought. Here, these two teachers at least, were very aware of the need for different expectations and response within the tasks set. Certainly from the way children came happily into school in the mornings and the class settled quickly into the routine of the term they seemed successful in the affective and social aspects of their diagnosis, at least.

Taking the examples above it can be seen that experienced infant teachers can try to help children learn in the new context of the classroom. This is not to say that they deliberately compensate for the context - in fact not once in the interviews did they mention that this was their intention. However, as experienced teachers, sensitive

to the ways children learn, they seemed to know implicitly to employ those strategies similar to those used in the home to enable children to make a smooth transfer to school learning.

### **Conclusion**

Five major factors about the teachers in this study and how they go about teaching children to read in the first year of school can be said to arise from the data presented in the previous chapter. Firstly the teachers have been shown to spend most of their time reacting to individuals and situations. They spend little time in instructional input and the tasks they set can be of limited value and challenge. Rather they set up a context and then reacted or initiated as they saw it to be appropriate according to their view of literacy learning.

Secondly, in their view of literacy learning, they rated cognitive aims highly and they covered a wide range of cognitive aspects in their interactions with children. This importance attributed to cognitive aims was not reflected in the task and role analysis undertaken in the first part of the study, although those teachers did refer to a wide range of cognitive aims when asked about this.

Thirdly, as well as and at the same time as their concern for cognitive aims teachers have other concerns. These relate to social, affective and managerial issues.

Fourthly a study of the strategies the teachers employed in their responses to children about literacy seemed to show them trying to actively engage children in the literacy activity.



Finally they seemed to be employing strategies to help children make the transfer from home to school learning.

### **Research Methodology**

In my design of this study I was concerned, primarily with two issues. One was that research into the teaching of reading needed to concern itself with the teacher and the context of the learning as well as with the child's interaction with text. I also regretted the prevalence of an experimental approach to research into reading and wanted to conduct a more exploratory study. At this stage of the research, i.e. when I am writing up the work and considering the possibility of further enquiry, I want to examine what I have learned from this study about research into the teaching of reading.

First of all I want to consider further my contention that there is a need to focus on the teacher to reveal more about children learning to read. I, also, want to take this further and argue that a focus on the teacher is not enough in itself but that this focus needs to give teachers themselves the opportunity to explain what they are trying to do. I want to argue that this partnership of teacher and researcher can be a powerful one. I also want to contend that the implications of this study for the nature of teaching in the child's first year of schooling should point researchers to focus on more than the teacher's management and implementation of tasks. The responses made to children by teachers (which are dismissed by some researchers (Bennett et al. 1984) as 'crisis management') reveal a complexity of endeavour that is not reflected in some models of teaching. Finally I want to consider those of my findings that were not directly supported by data from the interviews with teachers. I wish to show that these also represent part of the partnership between teacher and



researcher where the researcher's more readily accessible theoretical knowledge can extend further the teachers' explanations.

A major problem with the first part of the study had been the way in which I went into the classroom with preconceived ideas about what I was looking for. This was largely due to the fact that the study was originally devised to establish some sort of relationship between what teachers do and what children learn therefore a systematic way of looking at practice was important. By the summer of 1992, both my own ideas about research methodology and the focus of my study had changed. The dissatisfaction I felt with existing research into early literacy teaching still remained but I did not feel that the design of the first part of my study had helped me in my understanding of teachers. It had given me indications of what was *not* happening but had not yet provided me with any form of explanatory model.

At this point I turned to literature about teacher thinking and models of teaching that acknowledge the complexity of the classroom situation. I looked at these before I went on to continue my own research into the initial teaching of reading. Findings from research into teachers' thinking demonstrate the importance of involving teachers in the research process. Furthermore, it is important to go further than merely asking teachers predetermined questions after a period of observation. Bennett in much of his work on task design did talk to teachers about their intentions and how they judged activities had gone. However, it was my intention in the second part of the study to go further and ask them to give *their own accounts* of what they were doing in the classroom. This implied being as open as possible in my questioning so as to allow teachers to talk about what mattered to them rather than following my own agenda. This, of course, was the ideal. As it turned out I often led

teachers in what they talked about by my selection of incidents. I did, though, try to use as many open questions as possible and to give them the chance to raise their own items.

The opportunity for teachers in the second part to discuss what they were trying to do resulted in my being able to scrutinise my observations from the perspective of the teachers as well as my own. The teachers I was working with in the first part spoke, when interviewed at the end of that part of the study, about a mixture of social, affective and cognitive intentions for the children in their class. However, these were less evident from my observations in the classroom. Here, the analysis of task design and planned instruction made it appear that procedural intentions took precedence. This involvement of the teachers during the second part of the research in discussion about their actions is, perhaps, why I found less mismatch than have other researchers between what teachers said and what I judged them to be doing.

The way of looking at classroom practice in the first part of the study was derived largely from Bennett's work on task design. He states,

....teaching effects learning through pupil thought processes, i.e. teaching influences pupil thinking; pupil thinking mediates learning.

Intended classroom learning is embedded in the curriculum tasks or activities that teachers present to children (or allow them to choose), and as such the activities of the learner on such tasks are crucial to their development. Thus, in order to understand classroom learning, it is necessary to observe children's performances on their tasks, and to ascertain the extent to which the demand in their assigned or chosen work is appropriate or matched to their capabilities. (Bennett and Kell 1989 p.26/7)

Whilst I would agree with the first statement in this quotation, I would question the conclusion that follows. The tasks that children are given are undoubtedly important factors in what and how they learn. However, particularly in the case of reading,



tasks are not the only contexts in the classroom. Teachers lead whole class discussions, they read to the class and hear children read (or share books with children) individually. Also the data presented above show teachers actuating their intentions as much in their reactive responses to children as in the proactive nature of the tasks and contexts provided. This brings into question the suitability of task design as a way of looking at the practice of teachers of children of this age.

By talking with these teachers and allowing them to explain what they were doing, it can be seen that the intentions they had for the learners were multifaceted and might be different at different times during the teachers' day. The teachers in this study spoke of social, affective, managerial concerns as well as cognitive ones.

Macleod (1981), in a study of seventeen Kindergarten teachers, examined at which point teachers thought about their learning objectives. Using stimulated recall interviews, she found that teachers reported considering cognitive outcomes before and after the teaching, but that during what she called the 'interactive' stage social-affective outcomes were in the forefront of their thinking. Thus whilst planning may shape the broad outline of what is prepared for the day, once the teacher is faced with the class of children the plan moves into the background and it is immediate and interactive decision making that takes precedence.

Desforges and Cockburn (1987) in a two year in depth study of the mathematics teaching of seven experienced first school teachers comment on the fact that the teacher has very little time in which to reflect before reacting. Thus planning is of less importance during the actual teaching time than the teachers' 'knowledge in action' (Schön 1983) because of the nature of the classroom situation. Schön argues



that professionals do not depend on applying their general theoretical knowledge to practical situations. He suggests that they rely to a large extent on non-logical thinking and knowledge grounded in experience in their decision making.

A model of teaching that presents the teacher as technician, following plans and procedures, neglects a large part of what the teachers in my study were doing. My findings show that, in the responses they made to children and situations, they were employing a range of strategies in order to deal with a range of concerns. This more complex model gives more status to the teacher as a professional.

An examination of the metaphors used by researchers gives some insight into the way in which they have conceptualised the nature of teaching. Clark and Peterson (1986) cite Panel 6 of the National Conference on Studies in Teaching which convened in June 1974 to 'create an agenda for future research on teaching' (p.256) as having considerable impact on the development of research on teacher thinking.

Panel 6 described their view of the teacher in the following way:

The Panel was oriented toward the teacher as clinician, not only in the sense of someone diagnosing specific forms of learning dysfunction or pathology and prescribing particular remedies but more broadly as an individual responsible for (a) aggregating and making sense out of an incredible diversity of information sources about individual sources about individual students and the class collectively; (b) bringing to bear a growing body of empirical and theoretical work constituting the research literature of education; somehow (c) combining all that information with the teacher's own expectations, attitudes, beliefs, purposes .... and (d) having to respond, make judgements, render decisions, reflect, and regroup to begin again. (p.1)

Clark and Peterson infer that Panel 6 presented an image of the teacher as a professional 'who has more in common with physicians, lawyers, and architects than with technicians who execute skilled performances according to the prescriptions or algorithms defined by others' (p.256). Other writers have coined different

metaphors for aspects of what the teacher does or knows. These help to explain the different ways in which researchers conceptualise that which they are studying.

Woods (1986) discusses the nature of pedagogical knowledge, that is, in his terms, the knowledge that teachers rather than researchers have. This is described as a knowledge that informs and constitutes the action of teaching, involving the whole circumstances surrounding the task. It is informed by theory from a variety of areas; philosophy (why it is done), psychology (how children learn), sociology (knowledge of social factors affecting learning), and linguistics (communication). However, it is the way these inputs are transformed into practice that makes pedagogical knowledge. This leads to the question of teacher training, development and innovation. Woods considers the ways in which others have argued about how this pedagogical knowledge changes and develops. Some have argued that it is additive rather than cumulative; an art, like architecture and subject to prevailing values and economics rather than a science like medicine where there are great advances in knowledge. Woods proposes that there are elements of both in teaching but that the scientific advances that are made are incorporated slowly and often inadequately into the profession.

Brown and McIntyre's (1993) metaphor for the aspect of teachers' thinking that they are examining is that of 'craft knowledge'. This is related to the idea of teaching being a craft as much as a science based activity. They base their argument upon the fact that teachers learn much from the school-based components of their initial training courses by observing and working alongside others. They liken experienced teachers to master craftsmen who have acquired much practical knowledge about



teaching, largely through their classroom experience. The question of development will be considered further in the next chapter.

Thus 'craft knowledge' is used to describe the type of knowledge that teachers draw on in their day to day classroom practice. I prefer, however, Woods' notion of pedagogical knowledge as both a professional art form such as architecture where new knowledge builds upon previous experience in an additive way and analogous to science where there are moves forward in understanding and even fundamental changes in our knowledge (for example beliefs about how children acquire language). Although the term 'craft knowledge' serves Brown and McIntyre's purpose well it does not to me describe sufficiently the full range of complex thought processes that appear to be going on in the mind of the reception teacher while she is engaged in teaching early reading.

Acknowledging the teacher as a professional and potential partner in the research process, for me, makes an important step towards understanding what teachers are doing. However, looking back at the summary of the main points arising from the data, I find that two of these conclusions are drawn mainly from my own observations.

To take the last point first, my thoughts about the way in which teachers appeared to be employing strategies to help children make the transfer from home to school did come to me early on during my time in school. I decided not to make these thoughts explicit to teachers so as not to lead them in the responses they made. I had thought that they might bring up these ideas themselves. They did not. In retrospect the reason for this is probably that they were unfamiliar with the research to which I



have made the comparison (Wells 1987, Tizard and Hughes 1984, Juleibo 1985). They did, however, refer in the interviews to each of the aspects that I had identified as being strategies used in the home, showing that the strategies, at least, were deliberate. The lack of knowledge of specific pieces of research is not surprising. This is a good example of the way in which researcher and practitioner can work together to build up the picture - where both parties can contribute to understanding.

The fourth point, in which I speculate that teachers use particular strategies to engage children's interest and active involvement, did not occur to me until late on in the analysis when I was searching for reasons for the large number of questions that the teachers employed. For this reason it must be considered the most questionable finding as it is purely speculative. However, I do feel that it is an appropriate interpretation of the evidence. It also goes with the teachers' stated concern to motivate children. In order to test this idea further it would be interesting to go back and ask the two teachers about the strategies they used. It is possible that this is an example of one of those aspects of teacher performance that is not readily made explicit.

I do not consider these latter two points drawn from the data as different in kind from the other three. To me they represent another facet of the partnership between teacher and researcher. Here the researcher's knowledge of research evidence and potentially more objective view of the classroom enabled me to complement the teachers' 'knowledge in action' to infer further explanation. It must be acknowledged, however, that the notion of partnership has to be regarded with some scepticism. Although I had tried to encourage the teachers to talk about what they

were doing and thinking, I, the researcher, am clearly in charge of that data. It is I who present the data, interpret them and extrapolate conclusions from them. Therefore, in my research at least, the teachers can only be considered as benign conspirators, not true partners. An equal partnership would require shared ownership and authorship - which the teachers here clearly did not have. This leads us to the question of validity.

### **Validity**

The question that must be posed at this point is to what extent can the findings and conclusion from this piece of research be said to have validity. In my earliest reading about ethnographic research I learned of categories and findings 'emerging' from the data. This term seems to lend this type of research a mystical quality. Indeed I spent some time worrying that I should not be privileged to receive the 'sight'. This term 'emerge' gives the impression that the findings are an unseen but accessible reality beneath the surface that will reveal itself. In reality this is not the case. The examination of data seems to me more like a bran tub into which the researcher places her hand and feels around for what can be drawn out. She picks what she likes the feel of but may miss or even reject other things. Here to me lies the essence of questions about validity. To what extent do my findings represent this slice of reality or how much is coloured by my own perspective and preconceptions? The very nature of ethnographic research implies that there is no immutable truth to be found - rather a more or less convincing explanation of the data.

If we take the three aspects of Maxwell's (1992) typology of validity that was discussed in Chapter Three I can measure my research against these. I have tried to ensure descriptive validity by a form of triangulation through the involvement of the



teachers in the research. I have also used the quantitative analysis to test my own impressionistic views. Interpretive validity is harder to ensure. It is impossible to ensure complete objectivity and, without doubt I bring my own perspective to the study. I have tried to be open about what this is, but my analysis is inevitably coloured by my own preconceptions. Similarly the views of the teachers are their own and subject to all the potential inconsistencies of introspective data. However, I have tried to keep this in mind and used both quantitative analysis and critical scepticism to test my findings.

The issue of theoretical validity questions whether my explanations derived from the analysis of the data are legitimate. Would other people, while accepting the descriptive and interpretive validity of the data, question the conclusions I have drawn ? I have already shown by my discussion of Wells' (1987) and Bennett et al.'s (1984 & 1989) work that my conclusions are not perhaps the same as others. However, I am drawing my conclusions from my data. I do not seek to challenge the theories proposed by other researchers from the findings of their research. I am more concerned to bring to the discussion of how teachers teach reading and to debates about research methodology the possibility of other interpretations.

### **Generalisability**

The question of generalisability is perhaps an irrelevant one. My purpose was to take a small sample in order to produce a 'thick description' of the teaching of reading in the child's first year of school. I was concerned to look at reading in the classroom in a way that I felt had not been sufficiently used up to this point. I wanted to look closely at what was happening in a limited number of cases, so my research design was not primarily concerned with generalisability. My intention was to try



to present a model of teaching reading to the youngest children in school that could be tested further. This I have done.

However, the question of generalisability does arise when it comes to the question as to whether further research on this model would be worthwhile. In this case there are factors that enable me to claim some measure of generalisability. The teachers used in the study were selected as being experienced and well thought of by colleagues. In the first part they employed different (although this was shown to be questionable) approaches to teaching reading. In the second part, as the teachers described by HMI (DES 1990b), they had no strict adherence to one particular approach. In Chapter Four I have considered how similar or different the teachers were in the aspects I was examining. Although there were differences, I would argue that there are sufficient similarities to draw tentative conclusions about teachers teaching reading in the first class in the infant school. For these reasons the teachers could be said to be representative although further research on a larger population would be necessary to make more substantial claims.

### **A Model of Teaching Reading**

The data and discussion above lead me to present a model of teaching reading in the first year of school. Here I have attempted to represent the key role of the teacher as mediator of learning. I have tried to show that the teacher brings a plan for the context in which the learning will take place and her own concerns which include cognitive, social, affective and managerial concerns. The context is represented by:

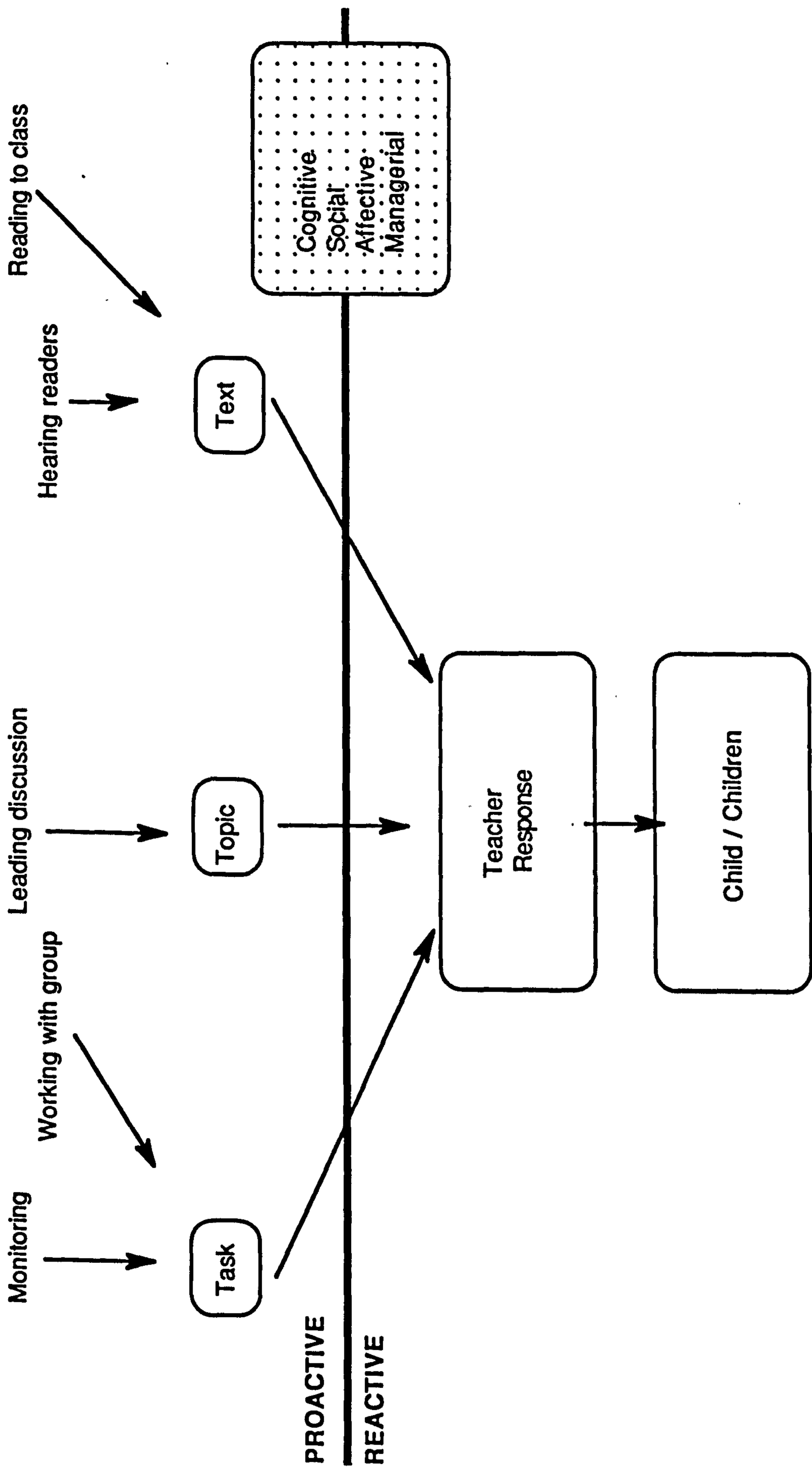
- i) tasks, in the case of the teacher monitoring and working with a group (these tasks are mostly concerned with writing activities);

- ii) texts, in the case of the teacher reading to the class or when she is hearing children read;
- iii) subject or subjects, in the case of teacher led discussion.

Each of these is mediated between the teacher and child by the responses that the teacher gives to the child or the situation. In the diagrammatic representation of this model (Figure One overleaf), above the line the teacher's behaviour is seen as proactive and below the line it could be described as reactive. This whole area below the line is one which has received considerably less attention from researchers than that above the line.

### **Summary**

In the second part of this chapter I have considered my research in the light of other approaches to research and descriptions of teaching. I have tried to show what this study has revealed that may be applicable to a wider population than the limited number of teachers involved here. I fully acknowledge the limitations and subjectivity of the study but present a model of the teaching of reading in the child's first year of school that perhaps can offer avenues of further research and have implications for current practice. These two points will be considered further in the next chapter.



**Figure One: A Model of teaching reading in the first year of schooling**



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In this final chapter I want to discuss the possible implications from this research for teachers and those who train them. This is not to make assumptions about the generalisability of the study that are not yet proven but to consider what the implications might be if the assumptions were generalisable to other teachers of reading of the youngest children in school. I also want to consider avenues for further research in this area. First I will review the main points of the study.

#### **Summary of the project**

This study reflects not only an attempt to find out more about the way teachers go about teaching reading to children in their first year of school, but also a journey in my own understanding of research design and methodology. I started from a dissatisfaction with much of the research into the teaching of reading and the way teaching reading was talked about in the press and by politicians.

On the one hand, the way in which the teaching of reading was talked about in the press and by politicians seemed to reduce it to a caricature. The idea for the subject of the research, as well as having been an area of study and interest for me for some time, was developed at a time of great controversy about teaching methods. Ill informed people and even some who should have known better raised scare stories about extremist approaches to reading in which teachers omitted to cover important aspects of reading or even did not teach at all. Having previously been an infant teacher and as a constant visitor to infant classrooms I wanted to investigate this and

to try to come up with a model of teaching that better explained what teachers were doing. This was not with the hope of having any influence on the scaremongers but I wanted, at least, to contribute something positive to the debate.

On the other hand, the predominant approach to research into reading is an experimental one which focuses on the child and the text. I felt this ignored a prime mover in the process: the teacher. This approach also tends to look for unequivocal answers and in order to do this adopts a methodology that separates the child and the text from many of the vital aspects of learning to read such as meaning, context, the classroom and so on. New ways of looking at literacy and learning as an active process in which the reader is constructing meaning from the text and in which the learning is embedded in context pointed me towards a different form of research. A more qualitative approach, whilst not providing such confident findings, would, I felt, provide me with the chance to gain an insight into the way the teacher went about the teaching of reading.

One problem with an ethnographic methodology to research is that its findings tend not to be valued by many of those who are more familiar with a quantitative, positivist approach. Ethnographers are not likely to come up with findings that make snappy headlines or make a definite statement that can be presented as fact. A result of this is that ethnographic studies of classrooms may not gain the attention that other studies do. They can, however, give insights and suggestions that lead people forward in their understanding. They may also provide a way forward for future research where deductively derived hypotheses can be tested with a larger population.



A further problem facing the researcher is the way in which much research, even though it may be widely discussed in the academic world does not make a great impact on what happens in classrooms. This is an aspect I want to discuss further later in this chapter, to speculate on reasons for this and to consider ways in which results from research can be made more easily accessible to teachers.

The first part of the study, although carefully designed, did not provide me with the insights I had been hoping for. In retrospect, I felt that the design which focused on task design and predetermined teacher roles did not allow me to observe with fully open eyes. Although any research is clouded by the researcher's perspective, the observation schedules appeared to limit my focus. Nonetheless, this part of the research was influential in that it helped me to come to a better understanding of research design and methodology. It also highlighted the need, in a study of this kind, to involve the subjects of the research in the research process in a more active way.

The intention of the study was to gain greater understanding of what the teachers were doing and, without their viewpoint, any understanding gained would necessarily be limited. Whereas animals may need to be researched without their participation, human beings, particularly where the analysis of professional practice is concerned, can and should have a part to play. Criticism is made of the limited view of the situation participants may have (Calderhead 1981), but this does not mean that it is not a valid view and one that needs to be taken into account. The researcher herself also has a limited view and one way of overcoming some of these limitations is to enlarge the views that are taken into account. Indeed, not only can the participants be included, they need to be given the opportunity to contribute their perspective without having it too influenced by the framework provided by the researcher. For



these reasons, in the second part of the study, I set out with a more open agenda for the classroom observations and I followed each observation session by an interview with the teachers.

Each part of the study yielded a wealth of data. The first part reinforced some of the findings of previous research studies into task design and also showed teachers to be spending very little of their time in planned instructional input. When the roles they adopted were analysed there was found to be a large amount of time spent overseeing work underway and interacting with individuals. Also, at the end of this part of the study, an interview with each of the teachers showed that the aspects of literacy that they spoke about as being important to them did not seem to be covered in the analysis of classroom behaviour that I had undertaken.

The second part of the study showed teachers to be interacting with children about literacy in five different types of context. Two of these, where the teacher was working with a group or monitoring the class, related to children engaged on tasks set. These were most often writing tasks. Three other contexts related more to reading and were when the teacher led a discussion, when she was hearing readers or when she was reading to the class. In all of these contexts the teachers spent more time reacting to children or situations than in planned explanation or instruction. This seemed to point to the teacher operating in a more reactive way than a proactive one.

Both the observations and the interviews showed that teachers were concerned with the development of a whole range of aspects of literacy. These included decoding skills, conventions, comprehension and response to text. However, it became clear

from talking with the teachers that they also had other concerns on their minds while they were engaged with children. These concerns related, firstly, to how the children were settling in and whether they were becoming confident and motivated in their work. Secondly teachers were concerned with the social development of children, how they were learning to cooperate with others but also that they should develop some form of independence. As well as these concerns for the child's development the teacher had her own concerns about the management of the class. These were to do with time pressures of getting round all the children, matching demand to the child's stage of development and the difficulty of socialising these young children into the way of school.

The teachers seemed to me, albeit implicitly, to be making some attempt to remedy the difficulty for children of the transfer from home to school that has been evidenced elsewhere (Wells 1987, Tizard and Hughes 1984, Juleibo 1985). The observations seemed also to indicate that the teachers were employing strategies that were in some ways similar to those which had been shown to be strategies used by parents. A further analysis of the linguistic strategies used in the responses made to children appeared to show teachers trying to actively engage children in the literacy learning. These conclusions differ from some recent major discussions of work in infant classrooms. Bennett et al.'s (1984, 1989) work, which had focused on task design, described the teacher as being inadequate at designing effective learning tasks, operating in an air of crisis management, and reacting inappropriately to children.

My findings appear, perhaps, to relate as much to all areas of the curriculum as to reading. However, the data, apart from some indications from the first part, do not give any information about other curriculum areas as the only responses recorded



were those that related to literacy learning. Two of the contexts identified related primarily to reading. These were when the teacher was reading to the class and when she was hearing readers. Also some of the strategies were specifically to help children relate what they were experiencing in text to their experiences outside school. The reactive nature of the teachers' interaction with children and the strategies teachers employed could well be applicable to other curriculum areas. Even so, when the data from the first part of the study were examined with reference to how often the teachers were acting in a reactive or proactive way, it was found that in the literacy related situations all three teachers spent between seven and sixteen percent longer in reactive roles than they had in other curriculum areas (see Tables Thirty Six and Thirty Seven on page 184).

What this research has told us about teaching reading is that these teachers, at least, were concerned to cover a full range of aspects of reading. There was no evidence that skills were neglected nor that children received a limited diet that concentrated over much on decoding. The data presented here indicate that teachers endeavoured to cater for all aspects of children's development. They show them to have a concern for children learning to read: for their learning to decode, to understand text and also to develop a good attitude to reading. What they do not show is how effective they were in their various intentions or how effective they might be as teachers of reading.

### **Implications for Teachers**

This study shows that these teachers were fully aware of the complexity of the tasks they were undertaking. They knew the full range of aspects of literacy that children need to take on to become competent readers. They also knew very well the vulnerability of their young pupils and how important early impressions are. Their



experience has taught them the need to socialise youngsters into the classroom to achieve a suitable working environment for teacher and children. They were also very conscious of the other constraints upon them such as lack of time to deal appropriately with the number of children.

The question then arises as to whether what they are trying to do is impossible. Bennett and Kell (1989) advise teachers to become more managers of learning and aim for less individualisation.

The problems of matching, monitoring and diagnosis are all intertwined, and all occur as a consequence of teachers' persistence in attempts to implement and maintain a philosophy of individualisation. It is this which is the core of the problem. And the reason is simple. Individualisation is impossible. (p. 85).

On the other hand Wells (1987) lays the blame for the inadequacy of some classrooms as environments for learning on (in part) the increasing standardisation of the curriculum and concern for mastery of certain 'basic skills'. Wells states that too often concern for the curriculum takes little account of individual children's experience. Curriculum planners break down learning into relatively self contained steps arranged in a linear sequence. This may be appropriate for certain types of learning but,

it takes little account of the fact that learning takes place in individual children, each of whom has different interests and abilities; and that, in any class, children proceed at different rates, learning quickly and effectively when they are personally motivated and emotionally stable but more slowly and with greater difficulty when the task seems irrelevant or their personal motivation is low. (p. 117).

He goes on to advocate a more collaborative style of interaction between teacher and child.

Although Wells' direct comparison between home and school showed schools in an unfavourable light, his view of classroom learning has something in common with my interpretation of the action of the teachers I worked with. They clearly were aware of the importance of motivation and individual interest. They tried to interact with individuals or to interact with groups in a refinement of individual interaction. Certainly, there is also currently much debate about the appropriateness of imposing a hierarchical order onto the acquisition of literacy. This, together with the greater demand for accountability, adds further stress to the teaching of reading.

The model of teaching presented in the previous chapter demonstrates a concern for both aspects of teaching presented above. There was a concern for the provision of appropriate contexts for children to encounter literacy. There was also the concern that the interaction between child and teacher was appropriately focused on both the learning and the child's personal development. The teachers undoubtedly worked very hard. They were aware of the difficulties of the job and tried to overcome them. There is no doubt though that the concerns that both Bennett and Wells have about the size of the class militated against teachers being able to be able to concentrate a great deal of time on individuals. Simple mathematics shows that in a class of twenty seven children where, following the average observed on my visits, teachers may spend approximately seventy eight minutes per morning or afternoon session interacting about literacy, individual children may only receive less than three minutes each. Therefore it must be essential that some of these contexts are group or class experiences and the strategies used differ in some ways from the idealised type of adult-child interaction that can be found in the home.



It is clear from the research studies cited above that teachers are not wholly successful either in their attempts at task design nor in their interaction with children. However, rather than saying that what they are trying to do is impossible it is surely the task of the profession to consider ways of helping teachers to become better at what they are trying to do.

### Link between Theory and Practice

Another aspect of this research is the link it provides between theory and practice. By involving the teachers themselves in the research it has been possible to provide an explanation of practice that may make sense to other teachers. Much of the work on teacher thinking has shown that professionals act with a fluency that they find hard to articulate. 'Capturing the descriptions of expert performance is difficult because the expert operates from a deep understanding of the total situation' (Benner, discussing nursing practice, 1984 p. 32). This is what Schön (1983) refers to as 'knowledge in action'. He uses this to describe the sort of knowledge we reveal in our intelligent action which we exhibit by our spontaneous, skilful execution of the performance. He adds that we are characteristically unable to make this knowledge in action explicit.

Calderhead (1987) has related this to teaching and argued that we need a language to talk about what teachers do. So often the complaint from practising and student teachers is that much of what is taught on pre and inservice courses is not 'practicable'. What is needed is a way of expressing theory and practice so that the one does not appear to exclude the other. Although this research has not tried to identify a more effective way of teaching reading, what it may have done is to provide



a basis for discussion between academics and practitioners about how reading is taught.

### **Implications for Inservice Education**

Brown and McIntyre (1993) criticise inservice education for adopting a deficit model approach. By this they mean that the 'emphasis has been on identification of what it is thought teachers ought to be doing and are not doing and on appropriate action to remedy matters.' (p. 13). Even in school-based staff development and action research the emphasis is on righting a deficit condition. Desforges and Cockburn (1987) in their study of mathematics teaching in the First School write of the gap between aspiration and achievement. They describe the way in which research into mathematics teaching has generated advice for teachers most of which is not practised in the classroom, even though teachers appear to welcome and accept it. All too often the response of teachers to an inservice course is 'it's all very well in theory but it wouldn't work in my school' and various reasons are cited such as parents, headteacher, National Curriculum tests and so on. Brown and McIntyre point out that very often the innovations involve teaching strategies that are less complex than those the teacher is already using.

As in the case of teaching young children, it is perhaps important to start where the learner is, in other words to help teachers relate the new ideas to their own situation. Inevitably anything new is seen as added on to an already full working day. The innovation needs to be seen as something that will complement existing practice and fit into the teacher's model of what she does. In the light of this we should look back at the two items of successful curriculum innovation in this area in the last few years that I cited in the first chapter: Real Books and the National Writing Project's

focus on children's emergent writing. Both of these were disseminated by a large number of classroom based descriptions of practice where *what* the teacher does is described as clearly as reasons *why* it should be done. Teachers could see themselves in the descriptions provided and recognise the benefits. Also both approaches replaced or complemented aspects of practice in that children could be asked to do their own writing on one day and copy writing on another; the fiction books could replace scheme books for some or all of the time. It should also be recognised, however, that few teachers have taken on these innovations in their entirety. They employ aspects that fit into their own model of teaching as evidenced by HMI (DES 1990b ). This leads me to think that the ability to present teachers with a model of teaching that they can recognise could help them to map onto this practices that may enhance their teaching *within an existing framework*.

### **Initial Teacher Training**

Recent studies have shown that newly qualified teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach reading (OFSTED 1993b). Various reasons have been proposed for this: the inefficiency of teacher training itself; the difficulty of observing teachers teaching reading in the classroom; and what Wray and Medwell (1993) identify as the perception, brought about by increased knowledge, that teaching reading is a complex activity. This research can contribute to this problem in two ways. First, through reflection on the content of university based parts of courses and second, by providing a means for students to observe practice. It does not appear to be a problem of lack of theoretical knowledge since students can demonstrate this knowledge in examinations (Wahl 1991 in Borger and Tillema 1993). Borger and Tillema describe the problem as 'a lack of knowledge about how learned theories



should be brought into action, which causes a transfer problem between theoretical knowledge and its application to relevant practice situations' (p. 185).

University based courses tend to concentrate on theories of how children learn to read and an examination of methods of teaching reading. The school-based elements emphasise the importance of planning. It is not unusual for students to ask, even after courses on teaching reading and time working in school, 'but how do they *do* it?' It appears that the fluency of action of the experienced teacher does not help students to identify components of the practice in order to try them for themselves. Perhaps an acknowledgement that much of the teaching of reading is reactive rather than proactive, as students are expected to be on teaching practice, will help students in their understanding of the classroom situation. Perhaps, also, an analysis of the strategies and contexts that teachers use to teach reading may enable students to think about their own practice and that which they observe.

### **Indications for Further Research**

The discussion above has made assumptions that the research reported here has a wider application than just those teachers involved in the study itself. While I feel reasonably confident that there are wider applications, this is an area that I should like to examine further. Another important aspect for consideration is the effectiveness of this practice for the teaching of reading. Despite criticisms of teachers and of the teaching of reading, most children do learn to read. Results of the standardised assessment tasks for children of age seven showed that seventy seven percent of children were average or above for their age. Without going into the questions that this statement raises, it does show some success in the teaching of



reading. This is not to say that there is not much more to be learned about how children learn to read and which strategies for teaching them are most effective.

In order to examine the findings of this study further it would be necessary to test them on a wider population. This, of course, then raises some of the problems that were discussed in Chapter Three. The feature of this research that I have found most valuable has been the active involvement of the two teachers in the explanation of their practice. I should not like to lose this in the search for greater generalisability. Possible ways forward could involve further observations and interviews of a larger number of teachers by a research team. While this is an attractive option it is also an expensive one. A more easily manageable option would be to employ a form of repertory grid technique to test the theory. The problem with this lies partly in the way it applies a positivist approach which is inconsistent with the theory on which it is based. Another problem would be the constructs themselves. In order to test the theory these would need to be predetermined, in this case they could be seen as irrelevant by participants.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to show the potential implications for teachers who teach reading to children in their first year of school. In doing this I have considered the research methodology as well as the findings. For me these two go together. The presentation of a model which describes the practice of these teachers and the identification of strategies used by them would have no validity without the contribution of the teachers themselves. The description and analysis provided is seen as a means by which those working with teachers on pre and inservice courses can map theories and innovations in a way to make them more acceptable and able to

be implemented in the classroom. The findings show the teacher's job to be a complex one in which they act in both proactive and reactive ways, employing a number of strategies to teach reading and to help socialise their young pupils into school. Their apparent reflexive reactions may not simply be symptomatic of crisis management but spontaneous actions based on consistent views about young children learning.

The research as it stands leaves much for further investigation. The wealth of data about a very small sample has raised ideas and theories. These need to be examined further and tested on a larger population.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Critical Review**

The most serious and central difficulty in the use of qualitative data is that methods of analysis are not well formulated. For quantitative data, there are clear conventions the researcher can use. But the analyst faced with a bank of qualitative data has very few guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of unreliable or invalid conclusions to scientific or policy-making audiences. How can we be sure that an 'earthy', 'undeniable,' 'serendipitous' finding is not, in fact, wrong ? (Miles, 1979 p.591. Quoted in Miles and Huberman 1994 p. 2).

An almost inevitable aspect of undertaking part-time research is that progress is slow and uneven. Although the thinking underpinning this research has developed over a career of working with children and teachers, the research itself began in 1991 and was completed (insofar as data collection was concerned) in 1993. The analysis and writing up took a further twenty months. Yet even this does not give a clear picture of the research process as there were many months where there was no time to work on it and other (worthwhile but infrequent) occasions when I was able to concentrate for considerable periods and achieve the reflection and analysis needed to produce work of quality. Therefore looking back on the almost completed document and in the light of discussion with colleagues, there are areas where re-examination and clarification of the processes involved may be needed. My initial satisfaction with the second part of the study, particularly in comparison with the first part, may have led me to overlook certain aspects of importance to the reader who comes to the work fresh. This does not, to me, imply less relevance or validity to the study but requires further examination of certain aspects.

I shall start by considering how I arrived at the units of analysis, their conceptual status and potential reliability. In particular, the conceptual status of these categories needs further examination. Did I allow my own preconceptions to lead me



to an unreliable interpretation of the data or do the categories allocated provide a structure that stands up to conceptual analysis ?

I then wish to reconsider the model presented at the end of Chapter Five. The production of this model represented a significant move forward in my understanding of the process I had been observing. Looking back on it nearly two years after its emergence I have now come to re-examine what it offers to readers of the research and to consider whether the model could be developed further to provide a more useful representation of what these two teachers were doing in the teaching of reading.

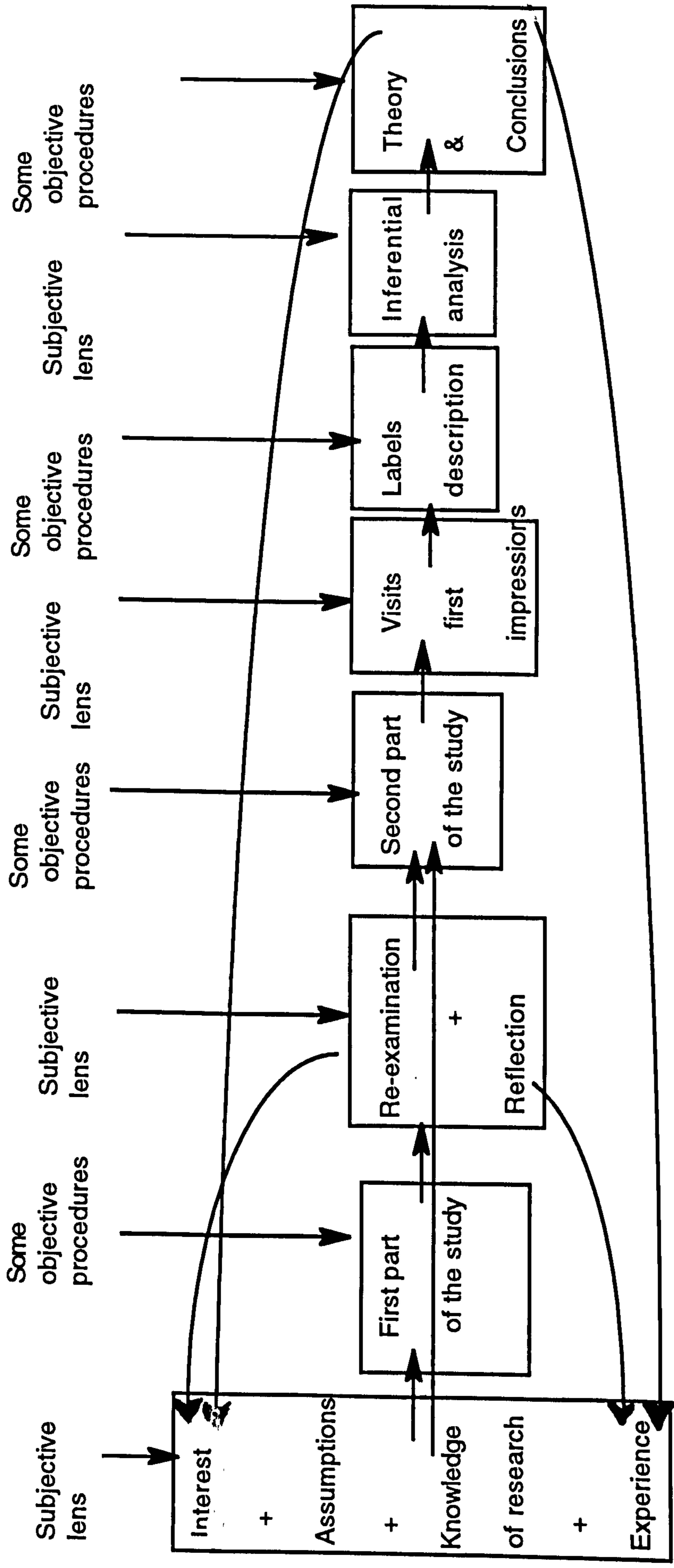
I also want to look again at potential threats to the validity of my work and the conclusions I have drawn. The discussion of the aspects outlined above and further consideration of questions of validity will give more confident responses to the question 'Why should this research be believed ?'

Finally I want to consider again the conclusions I have drawn and argue for the potential importance of such a study at this time.

### **The Research Process**

All research, but in particular qualitative research, has to show that it is more than a subjective description of experience. Qualitative research, if it is to have a purpose other than the gratification of the researcher, must go beyond subjective description to attempt some level of objectivity and some analysis and explanation of the phenomena it describes.

Figure Two, overleaf, describes the process of my research and identifies where my subjective lens is at work and where I have attempted to bring in objectivity. It can be seen that this research (as all research) started from a particular person's perspective on the question. This subjective lens through which the question is viewed affected the design of the research. In my own case these assumptions are examined in Chapter One. However, the design of research should then take into account the potential threat of subjectivity in the way in which the data is collected and analysed. In my case, the first part of the study was followed by a process of re-examination of the research question in which I increased my knowledge and reflected further on my experience before designing a second project. In the design of the second part of the study, procedures were set up to enable a measure of objectivity to be introduced. This occurred, for example, in the use of two methods of data collection (observation and interviews with teachers). The fact that I chose to start with a blank sheet on which to record my observations could be seen as an opportunity for the subjective view of the researcher to take precedence. However, I had found, in the first part of the study, that adherence to aspects of other researchers' designs, detracted from the openness that I had hoped to achieve whilst still being subject to the problem of the subjective interpretation of the researcher. Once the visits started my subjective lens inevitably influenced what I observed. The mode and rigour of analysis of the data collected should then return some measure of objectivity to the research project. The conclusions drawn are, inevitably, subjective in essence but, when the procedures followed have been rigorous, there is the possibility of claiming sufficient objectivity to enable worthwhile conclusions to be drawn.



**Figure Two: A diagram of the process of this research.**



### **Categories Used In Analysis**

This is perhaps a simplistic description of the research process but it has helped me to clarify the way in which I have grown in understanding of research methodology and particularly of qualitative approaches. It has been interesting revisiting works on the analysis of qualitative data to read about the process I have been through. Three and four years ago when I was reading about the development of 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss 1968), the idea of categories 'emerging from the data' seemed mysterious. At the same time, the hours spent working through the data line by line, chunk by chunk, idea by idea seemed a long way removed from serious research. Yet it seems others had been there before. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe the process of data collection in terms of: i) writing up; ii) line by line analysis; iii) the generation of labels; iv) the reviewing and redefinition of categories that are increasingly abstract. I do not here wish to reiterate the discussions in Chapter Four about the analysis of my data but rather to revisit the process to consider how it may stand up to scrutiny nearly two years on from when it was originally collated and analysed.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the process of analysis as

- i ) data reduction;
- ii) data display;
- iii) conclusion drawing.

The reduction of data is an on going and continuous part of the analysis. Although subjective, it 'sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organises data in such a way that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified' (p.11). The coding or categorisation of the data happens at both descriptive and inferential levels.

Figures Three and Four show the processes I went through in the analysis of the interview and observational data. Although analysis of the interviews preceded analysis of the observational data, both of the experiences, while they were happening and afterwards, fed into my thinking about each one. In each case I began with an initial impression. This was followed by systematic labelling of the units identified. Although I attempted to make the labels objective they were necessarily influenced by my initial impressions and pre-existing conceptual frameworks. The data were then further reduced by introduction of inferential categories.

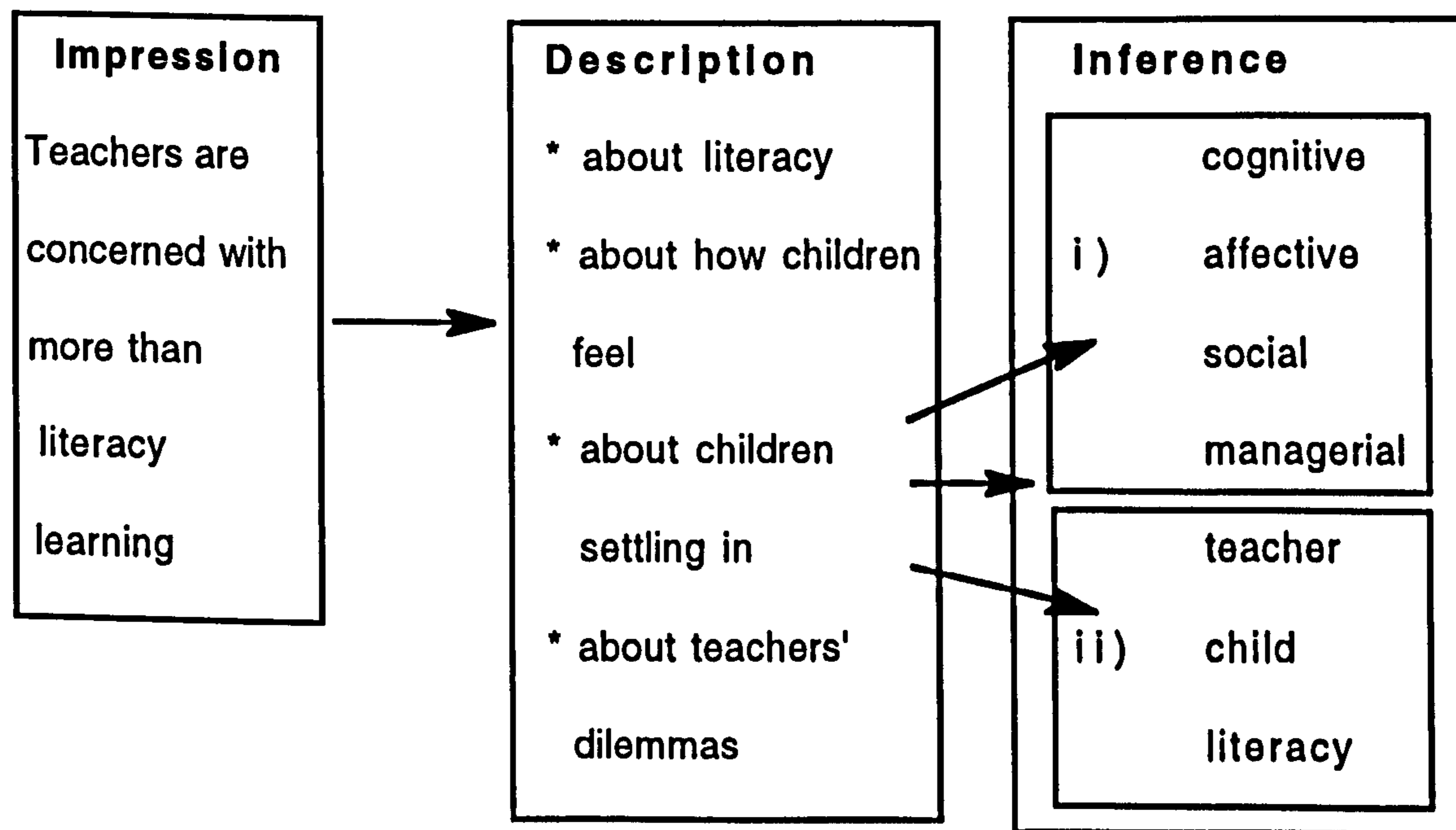
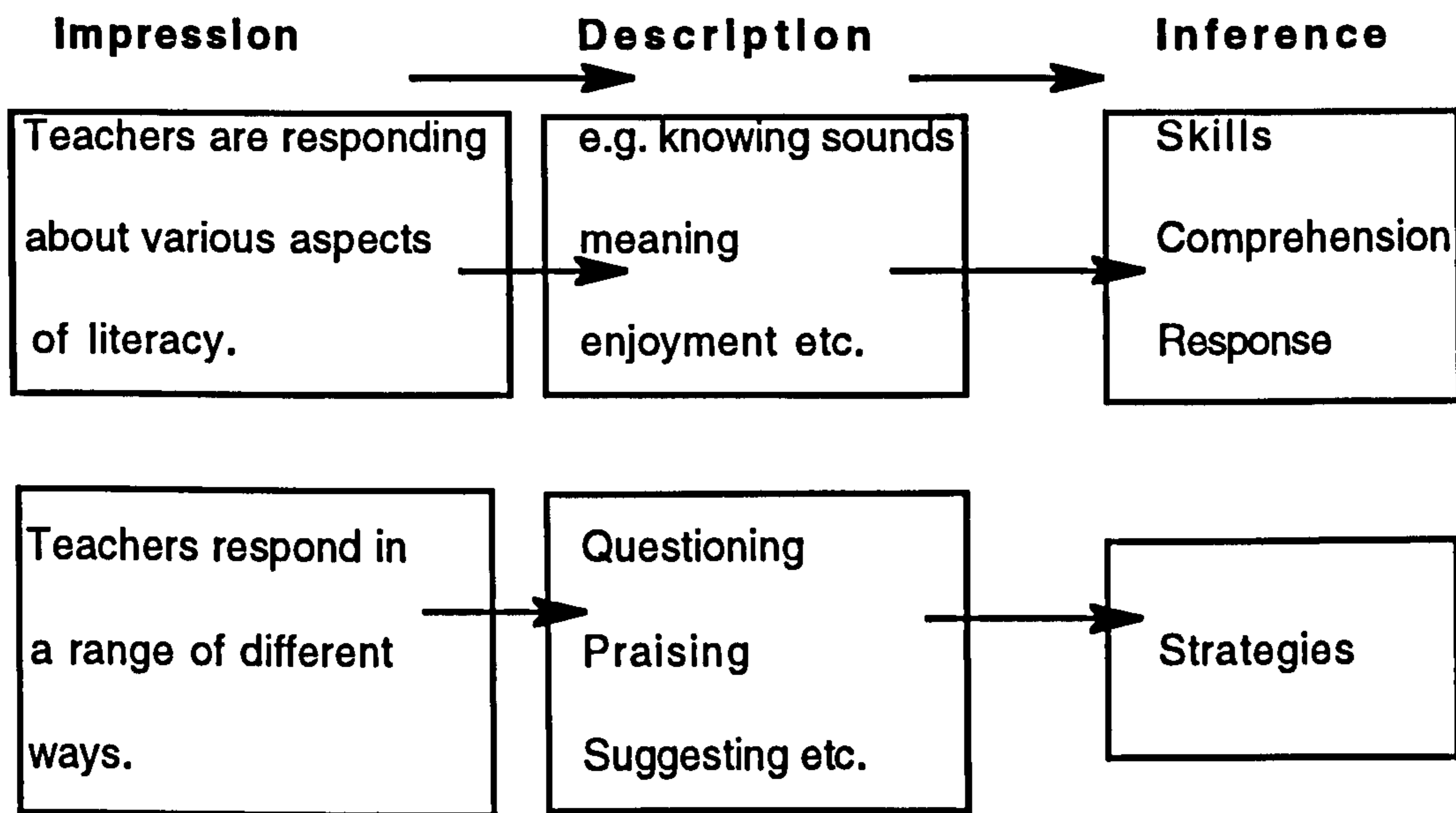


Figure Three: Process of analysis of Interview data



**Figure Four: Process of analysis of observational data**

From Figures Three and Four it can be seen that the process of analysis was largely similar for both sets of data, although it must be reiterated that it was not such a clear cut process as the diagrammatic representation makes it appear. However, the diagrams do enable comparison of the inferential categories. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that 'it is not the words themselves but their meaning that matters. Bliss, Monk and Ogborn (1983) tell us that a word or a phrase does not 'contain' meaning as a bucket 'contains' water, but has the meaning it does by being a choice made about its significance in a given context' (pp 56/7).

**Categories arising from interview data**

On re-examination of the categories I have different thoughts about each of the sets. Although I feel reasonably confident in the terms used to analyse the interview data, I recognise that the reliability of the allocation of these terms may be questionable where teachers' motives are involved. However, the final categories reflect my



initial impressions and cater adequately for my descriptions.

The terms 'cognitive', 'affective', 'social' and 'managerial' as well as 'teacher', 'child' and 'literacy' are, I feel, sufficiently widely used to be accepted for the purposes I have used them. This is not to say that other people would necessarily use these labels in the same way as I have but that their meaning is sufficiently clear and generally accepted.

The inferential categories: teacher, child and literacy are quite straightforward, both in their meaning and the assigning of them. More usually, here, the subject of the teacher's statement was clear; that is, whether the subject was the child, the teacher or literacy. Here I was able to assign an initial label that described, at least, the teachers' overt intentions. As, for example, can be seen in the illustration on page 157 (see Appendix One to this chapter).

The allocation of the teachers' concerns as cognitive, affective, social or managerial was more problematic in that I am often ascribing motives to teachers. In fact, going back recently to check my own consistency nearly two years later I recognise that the original descriptive statements are open to different interpretations where I ascribe motives to the teachers. However, even two years on, I was largely consistent with my original analysis. There is no evidence that my conclusions are invalid or that the concerns unreal. My use of some quantitative analysis was not intended to prove validity but to test reliability. The exact numbers were not put forward as precisely accurate but rather a representation of the situation *as I saw it*. They served to scrutinise my use of questions and my subjective impressions of the frequency with which certain concerns were mentioned.

I am, therefore, reasonably confident with the internal consistency of the categories. The reduction of interview data into the inferential categories was consistent at the time due to careful records being kept of how I had categorised each type of statement and is relatively consistent now when I reconsider the process.

For practical reasons which were perhaps unfortunate I was not able to check with others my interpretation in the ways I had planned. Firstly one of the teachers with whom I was working was taken ill and had to take early retirement thus making it impossible for me to check against her views. Secondly, I had set up a workshop at a Reading Conference where I had been led to understand that I would be working with practising teachers. I had intended to get them to consider chunks from the interview transcripts and come up with their own categories as a means of checking my analysis. On the day I was confronted by a Greek professor, three educational psychologists, a Scottish teacher, an American researcher and an English professor of Education. Although the ensuing discussion was interesting and stimulating, I did not feel that the responses I had gained from this very disparate group were sufficiently representative to report in the study, even though they did confirm my initial thoughts.

### Categories arising from the observations

Looking back on my analysis of the observational data, I find that most of my descriptive labels relating to the different aspects of literacy are less open to different interpretations than those used for the interview data. This is possibly because I have categorised smaller chunks of speech and because I had the contextual evidence of what the teacher was referring to. For example, when the teacher



pointed out the beginning letter of a word and asked for the sound, I described it as referring to 'initial sounds' and when the teacher asked what a child thought would happen next in a story I described it as 'prediction'. However, not all the labels were this objective. When Mrs Harris (28.5.93) read out to the class a reply from another teacher to an invitation they had sent and asked the children what it meant, I gave the label 'authentic context'. I ascribed a motive to the action that went beyond the words the teacher had spoken. This could also, in my categorisation, have been labelled 'meaning'. The label had arisen from my reading of the situation in the classroom and my growing interpretation of how Mrs Harris talked about her work. This demonstrates how important it is to collect data from more than one source to check subjective interpretations.

If most of these labels can be argued to be better (i.e. more objective) descriptors than those used for the interview data, this cannot be said to be the case for the inferential categories of 'skills, response and comprehension'. It can be argued that these imply a particular conception of literacy:

- i) that literacy can be broken up into small, observable parts that are not related to the purposes for which literacy is used; and
- ii) that literacy is more than decoding, it includes understanding and responding to text.

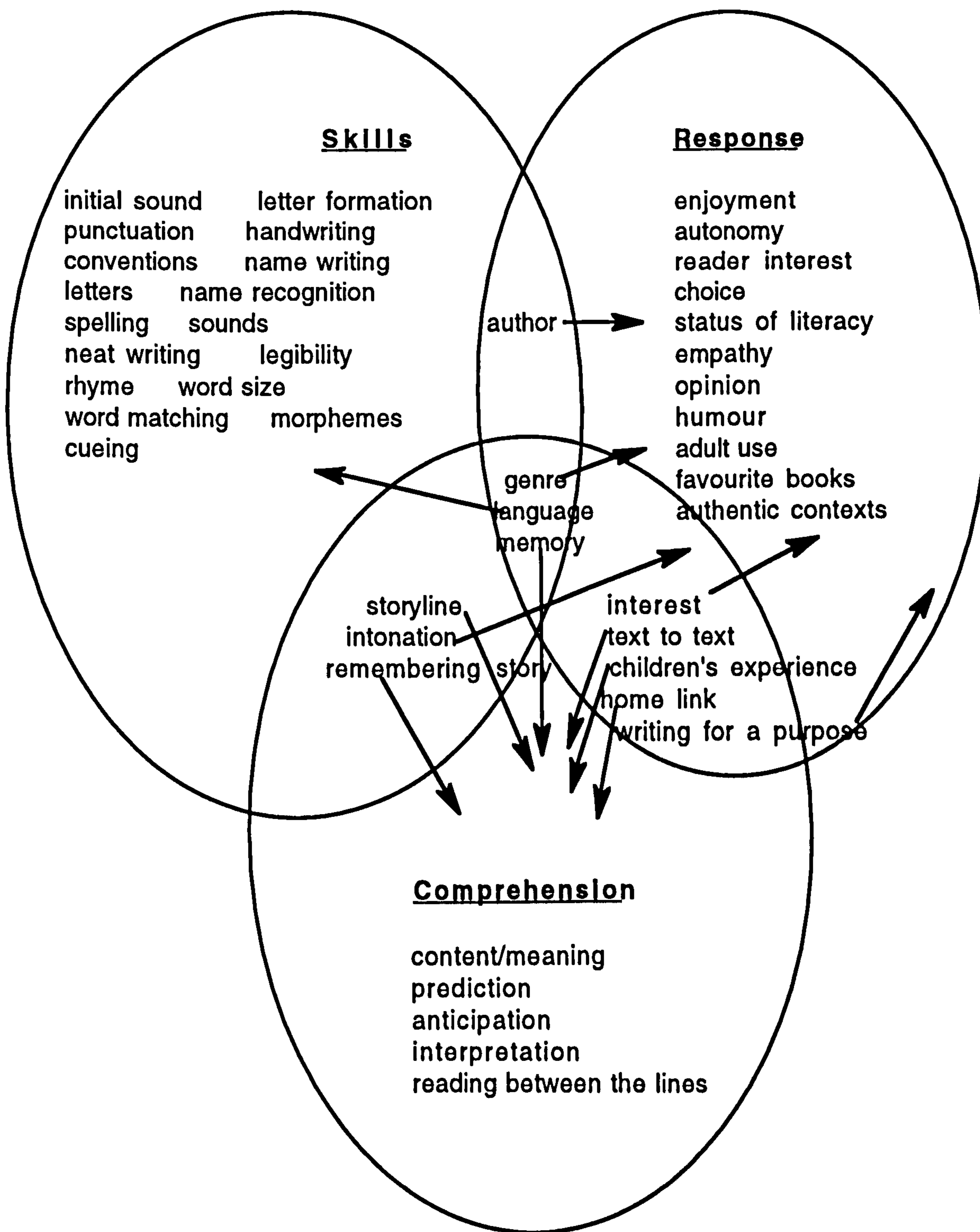
In retrospect, I am not unhappy with this conception of literacy and it did prove to be a workable way of analysing the data. I am more unhappy with the use of the Consultation document as a backup to this (DES 1993). My reasons for using it are still valid, in that, had it been adopted as statutory, my language would have been that used by teachers and it did provide me with an arbiter to ensure consistency (if not conceptual validity) for the categories. As I have argued above, the way I have



categorised the aspects of literacy referred to by the teachers does reflect my conception of literacy. However, the consultation document does not. The NCC paper (NCC 1992) that put forward the case for revising the English orders regretted the lack of definition of 'the skills involved in learning to read' or of 'basic writing skills' (p.9). Although I would argue that reading and writing can be broken down into component parts I would not argue, as the document implies, that the teaching of each of these component parts is desirable, or even possible, for every child. Nor that these component parts are all a 'skilled' reader requires. Thus the particular use of the word 'skills' in this context is unfortunate. I can, nonetheless, argue that my slightly amended use of these labels from the document does provide a way of reducing the data into manageable and meaningful categories that do seem to represent these two teachers' views of literacy. However, I would wish to retain my own definition of these terms rather than that put forward by the NCC.

In order to check my coding in the light of passing time I went back to the original labels with which I had described the aspects of literacy I had observed the teachers using. To do this I produced a Venn diagram which contained three overlapping circles. Each circle was labelled with my second level of analysis: skills, comprehension and response. I then placed each of the descriptive labels in the appropriate circle as I judged it to be at this point two years on from the original analysis. This can be examined in Figure Five overleaf. Of the forty-nine labels I was able to place 70% of them consistently with my original placing. (Miles and Huberman 1994 p. 64: reliability =  $\frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{total no. of agreements+disagreements}}$ ).

Most of the others were placed in an appropriate overlap between circles. Only three were completely inconsistent. Looking back at the original specimen



**Figure Five: Internal checking of coding system used in analysis observations**

descriptions nearly half of the uncertainties would have been accurately placed had I considered them in context rather than from a list. As for example 'intonation', the label occurred only once and my specimen description describes the teacher using 'intonation showing excitement'.

One of the first impressions I gained from the observation periods in school, as reported on page 139, was the range of 'strategies' used by teachers to assist children in their literacy learning. I had already found that the roles I had looked for evidence of in the first part of the study were inadequate as descriptors of what teachers were doing to teach literacy. Strategies is an interesting word which, according to my Shorter Oxford Dictionary (1968) has only a military meaning.

Here the difference between tactics and a strategy is between the *movement* of fighting forces for the latter and *management* of them for the former. This seems to imply a strategy to be a higher order activity than a tactic. The word 'strategy' appears early on in my drafts of the writing up the research although I did not categorise the range of ways in which teachers responded to children until later. Reconsidering the term at this later point it could seem that tactic is a more appropriate word than strategy to apply to actions such as questioning, explaining etc. However, the term is used here as an inferential descriptor not a straight descriptive label. It seems to me that, when taken with the picture of complexity of the classroom situation, and the layers of concern described by these teachers that 'strategy' is an appropriate term.

This revisiting of the process of analysis has been interesting and in some ways rewarding. It has been rewarding in that it has taken my understanding of research



methodology further, but it has been disappointing in that it has led me to question some aspects of the process of analysis if not actually the labels themselves. Two major thoughts remain with me from this review. Firstly, it seems that the labelling of categories is a more value laden process than it first appeared. In order for categorisation to be internally consistent the categories have to make sense to the researcher. However, to have a wider application they need to have a conceptual consistency to allow them to be understood and reused by others. Secondly, I have learned that the initial labels assigned to chunks of data need to be as objective and descriptive as is possible to ensure both internal and external consistency.

### **A Model of Teaching Reading Revisited**

The search for a model to represent a view of the teaching of reading was a goal expressed early on. 'A further aim was to develop a model of teaching which would offer a way of analysing practice, as distinct from programme or method. This model is not intended to replace the idea of method but to help practising and trainee teachers to map existing and new methods onto a framework that makes sense to them' (p.21).

A model can be described as a representation of something for a particular purpose. It could be a simple representation to serve as a reminder of what something is like as, for example, a model of a vintage car. It can also be used as an aid to discovery where, for example, a model of a car would be used to predict how an actual car would perform in certain circumstances. Models can also be used for explanation, as I intended. These are theoretical models and need not look like what they represent.

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A map is perhaps the most used and recognisable of models. Lewis Carroll (1893) describes an attempt to make a useful map which resulted in one with the scale of one mile to the mile. The farmers objected to this as it would have covered the whole area and kept out sunlight. It seems that in the production of a model compromise must be achieved between loss of detail and effectiveness of the model.

Chorley and Haggett (1967) describe theoretical models as a bridge between observational and theoretical levels. They can help us with the visualisation of complex phenomena but they differ from reality in that they are approximations. They must be simple enough to understand but representative of the total range of implications. They are selective, structured and suggestive. Bamrough (1964) describes models as bright lights that shine on a part of the scene and conceal other parts (p.102). Thus they are selective in their choice of the detail which shows what is relevant and interesting to the constructor of the model. Models are structured in that they are pattern seeking in function. The phenomena represented are viewed in terms of their organic relationship. Toulmin (1953) looks on a good model as one which goes beyond the phenomena from where it began to invite further hypotheses. According to Singer and Ruddell (1985) 'models should first be understood in relation to their *purposes*, i.e. what they are trying to accomplish, and then judged on how adequately they have accomplished it' (p.620).

The model I offered in Chapter Five was intended to explain the phenomena I had observed. It was not intended to provide a theory but to be seen as a stepping stone to the building of a theory. The extent to which my model can be used to predict reality relates to previous and following discussions to do with reliability. Kaplan (1964) argues that an 'idea is nothing til it has found an explanation' (p.269). A model can



have a communicative function but herein lies the danger of oversimplification. In order for the model to explain complex relationships there has to be some selection and simplification, this can detract from the relevance of the model. Kaplan (pp 275-288) regarded a bad model as one which is overly symbolic and provides a formalised view of reality in the attempt to erect a more exact structure than allowed by the data. This would give rise to inappropriate predictions from the model.

Looking again at the construction of my model I have tried to represent the data in a way that makes the complex situation of the classroom easier to conceptualise. However, I have tried to avoid oversimplification by including each of the elements of the situation as I saw it. I have tried to represent the relationships between the elements by the means of arrows and lines. It is here that, in the light of further consideration of the data, I feel I could perhaps modify the model to enable it to provide a better representation of the relationships. A model is a dynamic thing that must be subject to constant updating and usage in order to ensure its robustness and reliability.

In the model presented here I was trying to represent the complexity of the classroom situation in which these teachers were operating. I wanted to show the way in which many decisions were made before the children came in the room. These decisions were about the kind of teacher activity that would occur (monitoring, working with a group, leading discussion, hearing readers and reading to the class) and the contexts within which the children would be working (task, topic and text). I have argued that these aspects are those that have been examined in some detail by the research. I considered in Chapter Two some of the research that has been



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undertaken into classroom activity and argued that research has focused particularly on task (Bennett, 1984, 1989) and text (Meek 1982, Waterland 1985, Beard 1993a, Donaldson 1989). I have described these decisions made before the children come into the classroom as being proactive and argued that teacher activity face to face with the children is largely reactive and that this is an area that has received less attention from researchers.

The line in the model that stands between the reactive and proactive aspects of the teachers' action appears here to be thick and divisive. This is one area where the model may present an oversimplified picture. It is not intended to imply that this line is impermeable: rather that each side of the line represents an aspect of what the teachers were doing. Both teachers talked about having ideas about doing something in the classroom that had been planned in a general way previously but was only used when the occasion occurred (Mrs Devlin, the making of labels, 7.5.93; Mrs Harris, list of names, 6.5.93). The elements of teachers' response to children which involved anticipation and reminding also demonstrated the way in which the proactive and reactive aspects were related. These were most often related to individual comments when the teacher talked to individual children about what they were going to do but also teachers reminded children about previous activities and anticipated ones to follow, 'We got some insect books when we were looking at insects a while ago ..... the story books are a little different. I'll show you when we get there' (Mrs Devlin preparing the class for a visit to the library 19.5.93). There was also evidence of teachers' reactive responses in the classroom feeding into their subsequent action when they were talking about criticising children's work. Here it could be seen that previous observation of children affected the way they worked with them the next time. 'Katie and Jennifer were very happy to go on and

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write on their own today - they're not terribly confident ..... But yesterday they worked very closely with me on letter strings and looking at words and actually writing words down - so I suppose I wanted to see what they could actually do by themselves' (Coverland 7.5.93 II 35-41). There is little evidence of teachers *systematically* acting on classroom observation in the proactive elements of their action. However, the two do seem to interact in a dynamic way with observations leading to new activities being planned (e.g. Mrs Harris' dictionary work 20.5.93) and to reaction in the classroom.

An initial analysis of the evidence to ascertain the extent to which the reactive element feeds back into the proactive seems to show that this influenced the teachers' choice of text and topic. For example, Mrs Harris chose to read Mrs Wishy Washy with a particular purpose in mind arising from her observation of the children (30.4.93). Also Mrs Devlin described her use of a particular book at a particular time (Coverland 25.5.93). In addition, there were occasions when topics for discussion were linked to previous work. Mrs Harris (30.4.93) describes the way she observed the children responding to a letter she had brought in and relates this to previous work with a letter. There is, however, little evidence of the reactive influencing the tasks allocated. The example cited above, where teachers talked about their criticism of individual children, shows that observations and responses made one day influenced the way teachers *reacted* the next time but not that it influenced the *design* of the task.

This is an example of the way a model can generate an hypothesis which can be tested further. If the hypothesis, that teachers are more diagnostic in their planning for the way they use texts and topics than in the design of tasks, is correct it would add



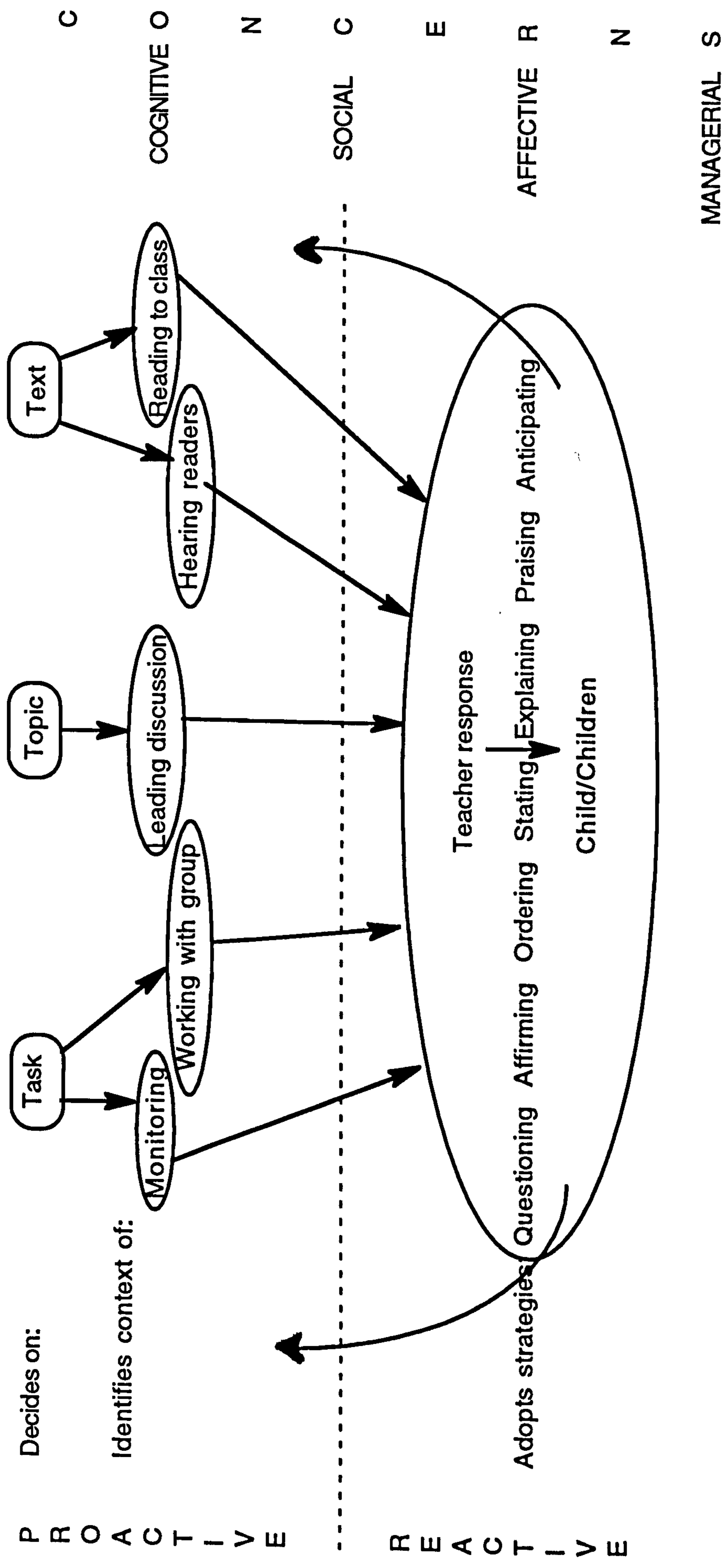
an extra dimension to the work of Bennett et al (1984, 1989) and Desforges (1987) which shows that teachers do not act upon their diagnoses or that they are poor at this.

The extent of the dynamic interaction between the reactive and proactive is not represented in the model. The thick line through the centre of the model was intended to show the division between proactive and reactive elements of the teachers' work. Here it is possible that an attempt at simplification has excluded an interesting aspect of the findings. This could also show evidence of author bias. My conclusion that there were reactive and proactive elements to the teachers' action clouded my reflection on the complexity of that action. It could be possible to rework the model to show the interaction between both sides of the line. The danger of this is a loss of explicitness through a superabundance of arrows designating the interrelatedness.

Another aspect of the structure of the model is the way in which the cognitive, affective, social and managerial aspects are represented. The intention was show that they influenced both reactive and proactive elements and therefore were positioned astride the dividing line. Unfortunately, on revisiting the model, it could appear that, because of their size, they are less important than the data indicated.

It is perhaps possible to rework the model to take these two aspects into account and to provide additional information. The strategies used by teachers are not represented in the model as it appears on page 220. These are subsumed into the box labelled 'teacher response'. The reworking of the model (Figure Six overleaf) attempts to include this aspect and to highlight the potential relationship between the



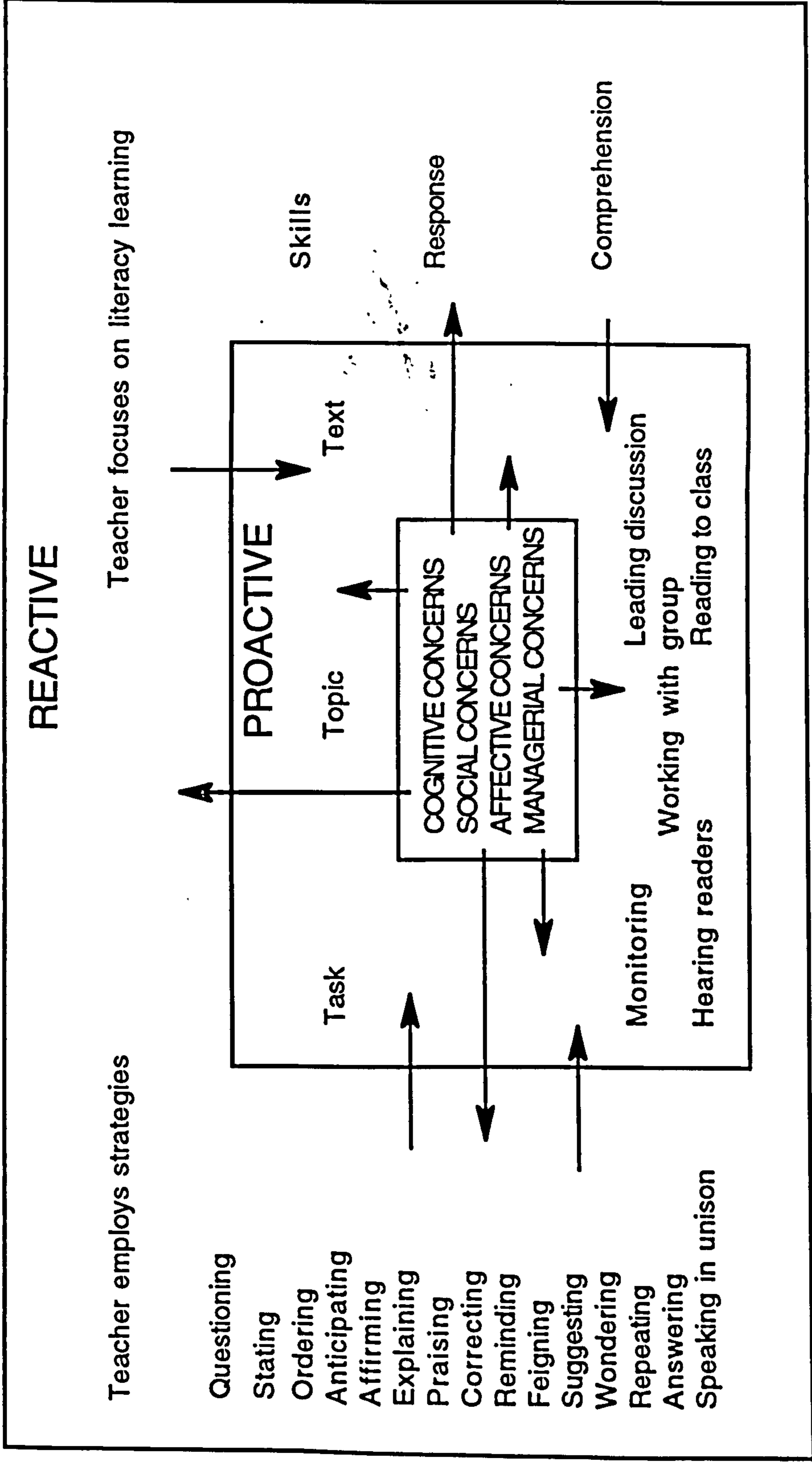


**Figure Six: A revised model of teaching reading in the first year of school**

reactive and the proactive. There is a danger here that the attempt to provide greater detail and accuracy results in an overcomplicated and unhelpful representation.

Figure Seven (overleaf) is a further attempt at representation of the model. Here concerns are portrayed as central to what the teacher does, both to the proactive and reactive elements. The arrows represent the ways in which the situation is dynamic and different elements are interrelated. Although this is perhaps a tidier illustration, it does not accurately represent the key elements of my findings: that the reactive and proactive elements are two sides to one situation and that teachers concerns for cognitive, social, affective and managerial issues influence decisions on both sides.

A model's effectiveness can be judged both by the accuracy with which it portrays what it intends to represent but also by what uses it may serve. It has already been shown that it is possible to generate hypotheses from this model about the extent of the relationship between the reactive and the proactive. In addition, there is my stated purpose of providing an explanation of practice that went beyond method to enable the mapping of new and existing approaches onto a framework that makes sense to teachers. To return to Lewis Carroll's useful map, an exact representation of the classroom is too complex to achieve without recreating the classroom. Most initial service and inservice education takes place outside the classroom and even the demonstration lesson does not disclose the complexity of the whole situation revealed by this and other research. The model presented here illuminates the reactive aspect of the teachers' action as being distinct from the proactive. It identifies the contexts used and strategies adopted at least by these two teachers. If we take the importance



**Figure Seven: A reworked model of teaching reading in the first year of school.**



of analogy in decoding as being an important finding from research (Goswami 1991) that has had little impact on classroom practice, it can be seen how this could be placed within contexts and strategies used by teachers in the classroom in a way that enables them to see *how* it can be used rather than resulting in failure of aspiration over achievement.

Therefore, it seems that the model presented here, in addition to having provided an illuminating experience for me in the organisation and analysis of my data, can serve further purposes. It presents a simplified but coherent picture of my data from observation of and interview with two teachers. It has the potential to generate hypotheses that can be tested further. It also may provide a map for those working with teachers of reading to young children that can help break down the theory-practice divide in the discussion and implementation of curriculum change.

### **Validity**

The question of validity is one that exercises researchers of all kinds, but it is particularly those engaged in qualitative research who question the means and purpose of ensuring validity. Indeed, there are respected researchers who question whether validity is an appropriate quest for those engaged in qualitative research (e.g. Woolcot 1994).

I do not wish to re-enter the debate at this point in the study. However, I do wish to argue forcefully that my study has validity, at least, in the everyday sense of the word, in other words 'founded in truth' or 'sound' (Chambers 1980). I cannot, nor would I want to, assert that the study can lay claims to validity according to the criteria laid down by experimental researchers. Nor would I want to claim that my

study represents truth as a finite quality. My claim is that I am reasonably confident that I have produced a more or less convincing explanation of the data. Others might well produce a different explanation from the same sources but this need not invalidate the conclusions I have drawn from my interpretation. Indeed the whole question of validity in inductive research, where predetermined measures of validity are inappropriate, raises the further question of 'valid in whose eyes?' Jackson (1994) asks whether an X-ray is a truer or more in-depth representation than a Polaroid and argues that the real question is which is the more fit for the purpose for which it is used.

Having asserted this, I also recognise the need of the researcher to be believed. If I were only writing for myself much of the rigorous procedure and analysis would have been unnecessary and I could have proceeded with serendipity. However, it is important to me that I am believed, both for my own self concept and because I believe that I have something valid to add to the debate about the teaching of reading.

Eisner and Peshkin (1994) argue that validity is related to truth, which in turn is related to correspondence, which is related to the distinction between the subjective self and the objective world. Had I wished to write for myself alone I could have proceeded with little check on my own subjectivity. This I have not done. Questions of validity are examined elsewhere on pages 112 -115 and 216-7. To summarise I have attempted to move beyond the subjective by:

- i) laying out from the beginning my own subjectivity, the assumptions I brought with me to the study (at least, those that I am aware of);
- ii) using both observation and interview to gather data;

- iii) using a form of quantitative analysis to test hypotheses within the data;
- iv) referring back to other researchers to check and challenge my own conclusions;
- v) being explicit, coherent and rigorous in my analysis.

However, as Grumet (1994) argues, detached objectivity and pristine validity are a hopeless quest as we cannot detach ourselves from the world we are in and the people we are. What both Grumet (1994) and Woolcot (1994) are 'getting at is the need to find a new lexicon that will do justice to even those aspects of life that are, at base, ineffable' (Eisner and Peshkin 1994 p. 98). They allude to a subtext that cannot be avoided as well as the text itself.

Although Woolcot argues against the appropriateness of validity as a criterion measure for qualitative research, he does emphasise the importance of being meticulous about the ways in which he secures information, uses it and revises his interpretations. Through this the researcher can expect to be believed or can enable readers to enter into the debate through the transparency of his/her procedures.

This I have tried to do. My purpose was to illuminate the work of the teacher of reading in the child's first year of school. I have done this in order to enter the debate about the teaching of reading and also in the hope of helping those who wish to learn more about the teaching of reading. This implies that I want to be believed therefore I have attempted to reduce the threats to the validity of my conclusions through the process outlined above. However, as my attempts at reworking the model have shown, the subject is extremely complex. Understanding, such as it may have been achieved through my study, is also dynamic and cannot be tied down and



neatly packaged for delivery to its audience. All I can do is make my procedures sufficiently transparent, my description sufficiently coherent and my mind sufficiently sceptical to give others the chance to make sense of my argument.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The discussion above has given me the opportunity to re-examine some of my assumptions and the process of the research. As with most discussion in a complex area, it raises as many questions as it answers. Whereas it has moved my thinking on in my understanding of qualitative research, it has caused me to reconsider some aspects of the analysis of the data. Despite this, I do not believe it would make me change much of what I have done. Any changes would be to the way in which the findings are represented to achieve greater transparency in the process of analysis. This clarity of process and procedure is the way in which the qualitative researcher can take the reader with her on the journey of discovery and can enable that reader to judge how far he or she, from his or her own subjective perspective, wishes to be persuaded by the argument.

Although a small case study, this research comes at a time when debate is fierce about the teaching of reading. (Indeed, I wonder if there has ever been a time when this has not been so.) A recent edition of the *Journal of Research in Reading* was dedicated to discussion of research into the 'new literacy' (Vol.16 No.2) This produced such an outcry from some researchers working in the field of experimental research that a subsequent edition has had to be planned (Vol. 18 No.1) to allow the 'other side to be put'. It is comparatively recently that refutations of the Apprenticeship Approach to Reading and other 'Whole Language' approaches have been published (Beard 1993b, Beard and Oakhill 1994). The debate will continue.

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This research does not attempt to weigh method against method but to add something new to the developing picture of the teacher of reading.

I have tried to illuminate and explain the actions of, mainly, two teachers. The analysis of the data collected has shown the way that these teachers were operating in a complex situation. The division of their practice into reactive and proactive elements has enabled me to make tentative suggestions about ways of working with teachers and initial teacher education students that may help to avoid the gap between students' understanding of theory and practice. This is important at a time when we are moving into more school-based teacher education, when teachers will be required to talk about what they are doing and how they are doing it.

The way in which these teachers covered a wide range of cognitive aims in relation to literacy is also important. There was little evidence of systematic, planned instruction in literacy but there was equally no evidence of aspects of literacy being neglected. These teachers concentrated their teaching across a range of contexts and used a range of strategies to engage children in the learning. These contexts and strategies did not relate to the overused concept of 'method' but covered what appeared to be a range of aspects of literacy and were motivated by a range of concerns about the child and the classroom situation. The model of reading described takes us a step further forward in our understanding of how teachers work. By illuminating aspects of this practice it may be possible to develop new ways of working with teachers to help them improve and develop what they do.

Both teaching and reading are complex activities. An outcome of debate about both, or either, teaching and reading is often polarisation that results in

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oversimplification. This I have tried to avoid. However, whilst recognising the complexity of the processes described I have attempted to illuminate this complexity in a way that makes it easier to grasp.

Readers may not wish to believe my view from such a small study. I have, however, tried to make my thinking clear and explicit at all times to enable those with doubts to examine my analysis and to enable others to check my interpretations. The model of teaching reading in the child's first year of school allows further hypotheses to be made and tested. Revisiting old debates about method is not helpful. Research *of all kinds* is needed to increase our understanding of how children learn to read and how teachers enable them to do this. I have provided a small extra piece of information about what happens in classrooms. I have interpreted this information in my own way, but in a way which can be examined and replicated by others. I have provided researchers and practitioners with, if nothing else, food for thought.



## **APPENDICES**

Appendix One: Questionnaire

PhD Research - Ros Fisher

Section One - General Information

Name:

Number of children in class: Summer 91  
Autumn 91  
Spring 92

Which, if any, reading schemes do you use regularly ?

What percentage of your class resources are spent on reading related materials ?

Less than a quarter      Less than a half      More than a half+

+Please indicate appropriate answer  
\*Please circle appropriate answer

**Section Two - The Teaching and Learning of Literacy**

1. How many times per week, on average, do you hear a child read/ share a book with a child ?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5\*

Does this depend on the ability of the child ? Yes No\*  
If so, please explain.

Please describe your practice when hearing children read/sharing a book with a child.

2. In which aspects of your planning do you consider children learning to read ?

- English curriculum planning
- Other curriculum planning
- Structuring play
- Setting out the classroom
- Display
- Other (please describe)

Please rank 1-5 in order of importance (1 being the most important):

Setting out the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
English curriculum planning	1	2	3	4	5
Other curriculum planning	1	2	3	4	5
Display	1	2	3	4	5
Structuring play	1	2	3	4	5
Display	1	2	3	4	5
Other (as above).....	1	2	3	4	5
.....	1	2	3	4	5
.....	1	2	3	4	5

\*Please circle appropriate answer



Appendix One

3. Do you plan to demonstrate to the children any of the skills or uses of literacy ? (for example by writing a poem)

Yes No\*

If so please explain.

4. Do you take groups or the whole class to teach any of the following:

- Phonics
- Handwriting
- Spelling
- Reading conventions
- Writing conventions
- Punctuation
- Knowledge about Language
- Comprehension
- Forms of written language (eg letter writing)
- Poetry

Other (literacy related) .....  
.....  
.....

If you do **not** teach any of the above, please say why not.

\*Please circle appropriate answer

**Section Three - Parental Involvement**

1. Do you see the parents in school before the children start school ?

Yes No\*

If so how often            1        2        3 times        more+

Do you visit the child's home before they start school ?

Yes        No\*

If so, how often                            1        2        3times        more+

Do you discuss the teaching of reading at this time ?

In school:            Yes    No\*

Home visit:            Yes    No\*

Is this an important and planned part of these meetings ?

Yes    No\*

2. Do you provide any written guidance to parents about your approach to reading ?        Yes    No\*

3. Please describe your policy for children taking books home.

4. Do parental helpers hear children read in school ?

Yes    No\*

How many have helped this week ?

Is this the normal amount        Yes    No\*

+Please indicate appropriate answer

\*Please circle appropriate answer

**Section Four - Assessment and Record Keeping**

1. Do the children take any standardised reading test in their first four terms of school ? Yes No\*

If so, which ?

2. Do you have any 'in house' formal reading assessment procedure ? Yes No\*

If so, please explain.

3. What informal reading assessment procedures do you use?

4. What reading records do you keep ?

\*Please circle appropriate answer



**Section Five**

Please add any further information about your reading policy or practice.

Thank you very much for all the time and effort you have taken to fill this in.

Ros Fisher  
March 1992



**Example: Task One**

**Group Task Analysis**

**School:** Yettington Primary School

**Group:** 7                      **Date:** 9.1.92                      **Time:** 9.30am

**Brief description of task:**

Handwriting sheet copying letters and words  
Look, cover, write check 'i' words

Allocated number: 4

Cognitive outcomes: Not stressed, letter formation, spelling practice

Co-operative opportunities: No

Outcome other than for teacher: No

Within child's experience: No

Negotiable outcome: No

**Individual Task Analysis**

**School:** Yettington

**Date:** 9.1.94 **Time:** 9.25am **Allocated number for task:**1

Child	*Inc	Res	Enr	Pra	Rev	Comments
1				*		could do easily
2				*		" " "
3				*		" " "
4	*					needed a lot of help and support.
5	*					
6	*					
7				*		could do easily

\* = Incremental, Restructuring, Enrichment, Practice, Revision



**Example Schedule; Task Five**

**Group Task Analysis**

**School:** Redgate Primary School

**Group:** Bottle group (6)

**Date:** 16.1.92

**Time:** 11.05

**Brief description of task:**

Children were asked to draw, colour and cut out pictures and stick them on a picture of a dustbin showing whether they should be 'in' or 'out' of the bin. Label them 'in' or 'out'.

Allocated number: 5

Cognitive outcomes: Yes (sight vocabulary) - but only a part of the task

Co-operative opportunities: Discussion, but not stressed by the teacher.

Outcome other than for teacher: No

Within child's experience: Yes

Negotiable outcome: No

**Individual Task Analysis**

**School:** Redgate

**Date:** 16.1.92 **Time:** 11.05 **Allocated number for task:** 5

Child	*Inc	Res	Enr	Pra	Rev	Comments
1	*				*	Colouring and
2	*				*	sticking = practice.
3	*				*	Learning the
4	*				*	words =
5	*				*	incremental.
6	*				*	

\* = Incremental, Restructuring, Enrichment, Practice, Revision

**Appendix Three: Observation of the Teacher**

**Planned teacher Intervention**

**School:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**\*No. of children:**

**Description:**

**Duration:**

**Example: Planned teacher Intervention**

**School:** Granville Road

**Date:** 6.4.92

**Time:** 1.20

**No of children:** 14

**Description:** Making a word bank for an Easter Story "What we do at Easter time" and reviewing the Easter story. Writing words focusing on sounds and some visual memory.

**Duration:** 20 mins

**\*No. = Number**

**Teacher role**

School:

Date:

Time	*No. ch.	Role	Activity

**Roles**

- Supervisor - overseeing work of whole class - non cognitive eg behaviour, attention etc
- Facilitator - enabling discussion, getting children to review work, participating in activities
- Monitor - overseeing children's work individually
- Manager - concerned with the organisation of learning; instructions, explanations etc
- Model - reading or writing with children watching or listening
- Instructor - hearing readers (when full attention is given to this) or teaching any specific point
- Assessor - subsumed into many activities but recorded when engaged in an activity specifically for assessment purposes.

\*No. = Number      ch. = children



## Appendix Three

### Example: Teacher role

School: Yelland Primary School

Date: 9/1/92

Time	No. ch.	Role	Activity	Lit.
9-9.05	/	S	Ch. arriving and settling down	
9.05-9.20	wc	S/M	Register and dinners	*
9.20-9.25	wc	I	'i' vowel, letter formation and sound	
9.25-10.25	wc	Mon	Monitoring work	
10.25-10.30	8	A	Looking at children's work	
11.00-11.10	10	Mod	Reading story and discussing	*
11.10-11.45	wc	Mon	Monitoring work, discussing individual stories	*
11.45-12.00	wc	S	Tidying up and preparing for lunch	
1.30-1.35	wc	M	Telling children what to do	*
1.35-3.00	wc	Mon	Hearing readers/monitoring	
3.00-3.10	wc	S	Tidying up	
3.20-3.30	wcx2	Mod	Teacher reading story	*

Abbreviations:wc = whole class

No. = Number of

ch. = children

#### Roles

- Supervisor (S) - overseeing work of whole class - non cognitive eg behaviour, attention etc
- Facilitator (F) - enabling discussion, getting children to review work, participating in activities
- Monitor (Mon) - overseeing children's work individually
- Manager (M) - concerned with the organisation of learning; instructions, explanations etc
- Model (Mod) - reading or writing with children watching or listening
- Instructor (I) - hearing readers (when full attention is given to this) or teaching any specific point
- Assessor (A) - subsumed into many activities but recorded when engaged in an activity specifically for assessment purposes.

**Appendix Four: Example of Observation and Interview**  
**Summer 1993**

School: Coverland

Date: 19.5.93

Time: 9.00 - 12.00

**Log of visit**

9.10 Register, discussion about 'leader'  
9.40 to the library  
9.50 Teacher acts as librarian  
10.00 reads a story  
10.30 playtime  
10.50 Children choosing books, Teacher reads with S.  
11.00 words and Pictures  
11.15 Send out groups...  
    making jewelery  
    pictures as king and queen  
    'some with me' (writing)  
11.25 Teacher with writing group  
11.35 L. and N. reading  
11.50 Tidy up

**Comment**

A much quieter day, only 15 children. Mrs Sargent not there again but Mrs Rigby in instead. A lot of literacy because of visit to the library and a writing group after play. Looking in the planning book there is evidence of more directed tasks being given - mostly English and Maths.

**Record of responses**

Where the teacher's action is described or words paraphrased this is recorded in italics

1 9.10 *While register etc is being taken S. and Je. are*  
 2 *writing the 'leader' and 'tadpole feeder' signs. Teacher*  
 3 *suggests that they can make their own label.*  
 4 S..... is our leader today, you could make your  
 5 own label  
 6 We also need a tadpole feeder, Je. you can  
 7 make your own label, it was T.'s name before,  
 8 you make your own label, choose your own felt tip  
 9 - *continues with class while children write* -  
 10 ooo Je. you've done that well - reads sign  
 11 aloud and sends Je. to feed the tadpoles  
 12 S. that's wonderful  
 13 Tomorrow I'll have someone else to write our sign.

-----  
 14 Where's V ? She's in Cyprus - we'll have a look in the  
 15 big map book in the afternoon.  
 -----

*Dinner register*

-----  
 16 Who's going to take these to Mrs G? We have another  
 17 job perhaps we should have another poster, What could  
 18 we call the person who goes along to Mrs G?  
 19 helper Perhaps we could have 2 helpers and when there  
 20 are other jobs we can use our helpers.  
 -----

21 When I got home .....

22 *P. and S. come back in:* Helpers will you change our  
 23 calendar, make it tell the truth  
 24 What comes after May ?  
 25 Summer Yes summer comes after Spring, but the month is  
 26 June  
 -----

27 When I was at home last night I thought about a  
 28 room in the school that we haven't been to yet,  
 29 everyone can use it, not just the older children, it's  
 30 upstairs, it's not a classroom. It's a room where  
 31 you find out things, it's a room where you hear or  
 32 read stories  
 33 play with toys - no you don't play there, it's got comfy  
 34 seats, carpets, I think there are posters on the wall,  
 35 plants  
 36 can anyone guess .....

37 all those books - there are lots of books  
 38 library well done - when we looked around the school we  
 39 looked in but didn't have a chance to browse  
 40 What's 'browse'  
 41 look Yes. What's special about library books - that we  
 42 can't do with classroom books



## Appendix Four

43 take them out  
 44 and bring them back Yes, L. again - do you go to the  
 45 library - who goes to the library in town ?  
 46 *show hands* What sort of books do you like ?  
 47 Gumdrop  
 48 Thomas the Tank Engine  
 49 K. Sleeping Beauty favourite books - If we go up to our  
 50 library K. will be looking for Sleeping Beauty  
 51 I'll be looking for..... (*chorus*) We'll go up and have a look and  
 52 have a story up there. If you take a book and look  
 53 at it, put it back just where you find it - it has its  
 54 own special place in case someone else wants to find  
 55 it. There is a clue on the book to tell you where it  
 56 belongs. we got some insect books when we were  
 57 looking at insects a while ago - gets them and  
 58 shows children - On this part of the book - the  
 59 spine - you've got a spine a strong bone that runs  
 60 .....(*explains*). The spine of the book is looking at  
 61 you on the shelf (*shows position*), there's a  
 62 number there that helps you put them back.  
 63 The story books are a little different, I'll show you  
 64 when we get there.  
 65 Who would like to carry the insect books, we found  
 66 rabbit books last term, do you remember ?

-----

9.40 *in the library*  
 67 This is my favourite place - lots of chat - we'll  
 68 choose a librarian in a minute, are we quiet ready  
 69 to browse (*emphasis*). *Talks to individual children*  
 70 Why did you choose that? Who might read this ?  
 71 my sister is not very well When I'm not very well I like to  
 72 have a good book to read.  
 73 This one's about stones, it's in the wrong place, I'm  
 74 going to put it back in the 900's  
 75 this book's not got a number No the big story books go in  
 76 here, like in the library in town.

-----

77 10.00 Would someone like to choose a favourite book  
 78 *discipline* - then you won't disturb anyone and that  
 79 won't spoil the story -  
 80 my nanny's got that one and did she get it from the  
 81 library?  
 82 ..... browsing time is over now .... *starts book*  
 83 it's called ..... it's written by Denis Reade, S.  
 84 picked up a book by Richard Scary, how did you  
 85 recognise it ?  
 86 *S. responds*  
 87 I don't know Denis Reade. *Reads.....*  
 88 'through his binoculars' *makes hands into binoculars*  
 89 *reads text, shows pictures occasional discipline*  
 90 *explains* - the king wants the island  
 91 - he wasn't havng any more of that  
 92 *uses intonation, body language and signs (binoculars)*

## Appendix Four

93 who's left, who hasn't had a go ?  
 94 buffalo I don't think there was a buffalo  
 95 guesses a pole vaulter - *explains*  
 96 the king decides to go to the island himself  
 97 how does he get there? a boat I expect, later *points to boat*  
 98 *in the picture* that's how the book tells us how he  
 99 gets there  
 100 the king doesn't want the island anymore  
 101 because he hasn't any more coconuts  
 102 he has  
 103 he has  
 104 he has *teacher has been showing the picture*  
 105 he's got a big pile hidden behind the house hasn't he  
 106 - that's how the picture shows us.  
 107 I'll take it back to the classroom, where shall we  
 108 put it in the classroom ?

-----  
 109 *Back in the classroom* We've had such a nice time in the  
 110 library, we stayed longer than I intended.  
*PLAYTIME*

-----  
 111 10.50 *Ch. choosing books T, looks at W & P booklet* I'm  
 112 looking to see which story we're having on Words  
 113 and Pictures today'

-----  
 114 *T. reading with S.*  
 115 *S. reads* still not happy is he ?  
 116 he wanted ... didn't he

-----  
 117 *Story for Words and Pictures* see if you can guess - it's about  
 118 a man making shoes and someone comes to help,  
 119 what's that called ?  
 120 *response* repeats 'The Elves and the Shoemaker'  
 121 Where are shoes made today ?  
 122 shop no - where are shoes made ?  
 123 *etc* I think most of your shoes were made in a factory

-----  
 124 11.00 *Words and Pictures with Year One*  
 125 11.15 *Send out to get on: making jewelery*  
 126 *special pictures as kings and queens*  
 127 'some with me' (writing)

-----  
 128 *Writing group* How about finding your name card then you  
 129 can do your name just right. Let's do some  
 130 writing all together when you've done your names

### Teacher monitoring

To whom	Reason	Teacher response
131	E	Can you use a writing pencil for your writing
132 11.25		<i>Lots of positive comment:</i> that's lovely, you're getting good, you're getting clever
133		<i>Helps to find page</i> - you did that beautifully
134 C.	E	there ( <i>previous page</i> )
135		
136 J.	E	Well done that's really good



Appendix Four

137 I'll do my name first		That's right then we are ready to write
138		I'm going to clean my board because it says
139		Tuesday and it's Wednesday
140 it's Wednesday		L. you had a book about shoes last
141		night
142 <i>L. gets book</i>		<i>Teacher shows to group</i>
143		<i>to group:</i> Put your finger where we're going to
144		start the writing - point - now watch see what
145		I'm going to do. I'm going to go round and round
146		see if you can make a pattern like that all the
147		way along. It's easy for S., he's done this
148 so have I		before. You've got one at the beginning of S....
149	E	<i>holds C.s hand while she writes</i>
150	E	<i>holds J.'s hand while he writes</i>
151		We saw some shabby shoes and shiny shoes -
152		you don't have to write this just watch
153 shabby		that's a funny word - what does it mean ?
154		I'm going to write shiny as well
155 one of my shoes is shiny		
156 and one shabby		how did you manage that?
157	F	P. you have done that well I love that
158		letter next to the s ( <i>h</i> )
-----		
159 11.35		L. read your story to me - did you have it
160		last night ? - open up the book
161 trainers		who might have trainers - they look rather
162		shabby there's a hole in them
163 wellington boots		I hope we don't need those today
164 dancing shoes		very pretty like the shoes Sophe had on
165		Who do they belong to ?
166 caterpillar		A little creature with lots of feet we didn't see
167		those in the (.....?)
168		That was really good do you want to choose
169		another one - do you know where we keep those
170	D	books. N. you can bring your reading book if
177		you like
178 <i>L., shows him record book</i>		then make sure
179		you don't get the same book. It's called The
180		Island we had an island in our story today.
181 <u>T. reads story</u>		<i>points to print</i>
182		What's happening ?
184		points to picture It's not an island at all its a
185		hippo ! They thought it was an island. .... <i>turns</i>
186		<i>to last page</i> - they're all going away together
187		are'nt they.
-----		
188		<i>To N.</i> what was it called ?
189 <i>says title</i>		<i>Repeats title</i> - can you point to the words ?
190 <i>tries to turn too early</i>		You've missed a page out,
191 <i>reads</i>		he's coming down the wall
192 <i>reads that bird's trying to get him</i>		
193 <i>stops at 'drain pipe'</i>		It's a drain pipe - <i>points to picture</i>



Interview

Coverland

19.5.93

Tape One A 183-442

*How important do you feel it is to establish a routine in the class ?  
Do you do it ?*

1 Yes I do. I think they need to ... once they are aware of it  
2 most children enjoy that it's security but you can see the  
3 development. This morning it was the first time they have  
4 made their own notices about who is the leader, thinking  
5 about that last night hopefully they will see what's going on  
6 and do that without me having to say that will all be part of  
7 being the leader that you make the poster to let everybody  
8 know. So the routines are there the development and the  
9 progression is there too.

*So there are routines with dinner numbers and things but what about those to do with  
learning to read and learning.*

10 There are certain things that happen at certain times and  
11 behaving in the right sort of way. The library again was  
12 another first but I can see that very quickly becoming a  
13 routine they'll know about the way we go. Some children I'm  
14 sure they found it hard to even visualise where we were  
15 going to be and I thought some might get a little bit worried,  
16 they haven't been there before - J. thought we'd even have  
17 to go in a car. They'd been there once when we'd had a  
18 general tour around early on in one of their visits I think.

*Just going back to that writing the labels this morning do you remember choosing Je.,  
you chose S. and then Je. what were you thinking - why did you choose those two ?*

19 Because they'd be able to cope with the change in style and  
20 they'd be keen to do it they wouldn't feel worried and the  
21 other children would latch on, tomorrow I'll probably choose  
22 two of the others as well and the others will latch on and  
23 realise that they can have a go. In the afternoon P., he  
24 asked if he could make a label (he had been chosen to be a  
25 helper) and that really pleased me - he didn't show it to me  
26 and he has taken it home, it was probably his own emergent  
27 writing but it was nice that he wanted to do that.

*Generally do you ever criticise children's writing or reading ?*

28 Mmmm writing rather than reading. I do criticise work that  
29 we actually record in our books if I feel it's appropriate.  
30 M. responds well - because it was a struggle for him and  
31 occasionally he does lapse back into just a few scribbles on a  
32 page and I say to him that doesn't really tell me anything  
33 about M. or that's not really your best work or I can't  
34 really tell what that is. And he will go back and have  
35 another go. Yesterday we had day like that we had the  
36 story of the wobbly tooth and he was keen to get outside,

## Appendix Four

37 we'd had a very short time when we'd had the large toys out  
38 between showers so it was totally understandable - we just  
39 had scribbles and just an M for M..... and he did go back  
40 and had another go and was happy to do that and so it  
41 works for him it's knowing when its appropriate. It wouldn't  
42 be worth criticising, at the moment, J. or M. - I  
43 mean you accept what they do - and C. also. I wouldn't  
44 use that approach with them as yet.

*Someone in the writing group got their book the wrong way up (that was Ja.), what did you think about that ?*

45 She, I pointed out that it was the wrong way up but that it  
46 didn't really matter - we made light of that, she wasn't very  
47 confident in the first few days, tearful so that just went .....  
48 it was pointed out and I think she was able to cope with that  
49 and I think she is the sort of child that will only happen once  
50 and then tomorrow or the next time will look to see her book  
51 is the right way up because she is that type of child.

*How did you choose the children for the writing group ? I know you don't keep to rigid groups they weren't all of the same intake ?*

52 N. is always very keen to be involved with the writing  
53 activities and really I wanted him to know that there was a  
54 chance, S. isn't so good in the afternoon which is why I  
55 had him there. C. was to keep Ja. company. Ja. had  
56 shown an interest, I think I had probably already asked who  
57 would like ..... she did immediately show an interest so I  
58 went into that. The way I am working at the moment is not  
59 the way I always work, because of the way the class is  
60 turning out I'm really letting them have a free rein and then  
61 drawing a few in in that way I am not having any sort of  
62 confrontation. R. and people like that play is still very  
63 important and he needs to know that whatever he is going to  
64 be able to play at some stage he is going to play and he needs  
65 to know that but he doesn't object quite so much if he's had  
66 that time and then I bring him out and he goes back - the  
67 two that actually brought the animals over to the table they  
68 weren't going to let them go !!!!

*What did you hope that the ones who were in the group were actually going to get out of that ?*

69 P. was particularly pleasing in that he wanted to write all  
70 by himself, I would have hoped that A. and S. would  
71 have gone on to do a little bit more. C. is very much  
72 needing just the control of it all and getting a line of  
73 something going across a page. N. is very keen on letter  
74 shapes. So really it was whatever level they were at there  
75 was something in there for all of them. The name writing is  
76 probably the only time I insist the letter shapes are made



## Appendix Four

77 correctly, that's something I really do work at and I like to  
78 see how they are progressing there. And S. just gave me  
79 S. R - he does write R.....(surname) but it's a struggle.  
80 And A. we've moved on from sort of circles with a stick  
81 which is not a thing we teach in school but they come to  
82 school often with that - the 'd's and 'a's - and it's very hard  
83 to get them out of that but it has happened with him. They  
84 are all doing a pretty fair copy of their name it's again a  
85 routine when you see the progression, with C. there you  
86 could actually see something like the two strokes down of the  
87 double 'l' in C. and the curly shapes, she was getting the  
88 idea from the others I've got a card I could perhaps use it to  
89 copy and she latched on to that. So again it's a routine but  
90 the progression that you see is really good.

*Did some more children do some writing this afternoon ? (A. had not written in the morning although included in the answer to the previous question).*

91 Yes a similar sort of thing, we had the story of Susie's shiny  
92 shoes which, Na. found that this morning in the library  
93 and it's about a girl who goes to see the queen so it all ties up  
94 rather well..... (tells story) and Na. found it. I didn't  
95 know it was going to be so good I took a ... it looked quite an  
96 attractive book but Na.'s not likely to have anyone to read  
97 that story to her at home not likely to have the time so I  
98 particularly chose her so that she had an idea of the story  
99 and then she may browse through it herself during the week  
100 or she may pester someone to read it to her again because it  
101 was such a good story.

*Did you have in your mind any one important thing that you wanted to get out of this morning ?*

102 Obviously the library that was important and that went on  
103 much longer than I thought it would, it was going well so I  
104 really lingered there in a way. Yes I wanted them to have a  
105 different type of book to take home at times parents I think  
106 especially with the new ones (??) it might be a reading book  
107 oh we've got to read your reading book so I thought it would  
108 be a different type of book to go into the home. They seemed  
109 pretty au fait with the set up how you take it to the counter  
110 that was good that was something I had hoped to introduce  
111 this morning or to talk about and it was fairly quiet when it  
112 was story time, I wanted them - we shall do that each  
113 Wednesday - we'll finish up with a story there all together,  
114 that worked well. Umm, other than I knew I'd do some  
115 follow up from the Words and Pictures I hadn't ..... I thought  
116 I'd wait and see what happened with that.



*Were you surprised how many children said they went to the library ?*

117 Yes - (pause, had not noticed who and really how many had  
118 put up their hands) I don't know how often they go and of  
119 course some put their hands up because other people put  
120 their hands up. When I do home visits it's something we talk  
121 about. C. library is pretty good they often have holiday  
122 activities I don't know if any of our children join in with  
123 those. It's a good library ..... Na. said she went and that  
124 did surprise me. I can't remember now..... J. goes. I can't  
125 remember having any particular reaction there at all.

126 Talks about being pleased with the day, one or two key  
127 figures away and that they were quieter than usual.

*It was a more directed day which perhaps leads it to being quieter, less choosing ?*

128 We were are moving on from there - it won't do them any  
129 favours to give them too long a time with that sort of ....  
130 complete freedom they came in very much as a nursery  
131 group and were used to that type of day but they are  
132 moving on.

*Have they all got reading books now ?*

133 Yes and throughout the afternoon they were all able to tell  
134 me about the story they had had. B., his mother was out  
135 there this morning I saw choosing reading books to take home  
136 - he wasn't keen to have just pictures books, he couldn't tell  
137 me the story because there weren't any words. They had  
138 been doing a lot at home with words and then they find it  
139 difficult without the print yet I do like to start with the  
140 picture books because it's a good insight into the way the child  
141 is thinking. C. who wouldn't be able to read print at all  
142 actually told a story and her voice was going up and down  
143 and that was surprising really because I didn't think she  
144 would be that far along really. Obviously Mum or Dad had  
145 sat with her last night and she was then mimicking that  
146 style. Perhaps they do tell her stories, she is an only child so  
147 there'd be lots of time for that. But that was very pleasing  
148 because she surprised me I didn't think she would have that  
149 style in her or the confidence - she muttered a little but it  
150 was all there the tone and the surprise on the last page - she  
151 knew all about the story.  
152

**Appendix Five: Responses to the Questionnaire**

Key: A = Redgate, B = Granville Road, C = Yelland

**Section One - General Information**

		A	B	C
<i>Number of children in class:</i>	Summer 91	27	30	31
	Autumn 91	29	23	23
	Spring 92	29	26	23
	Summer 92	29	?	30

*Which, if any, reading schemes do you use regularly ?*

A - Story Chest

B - Oxford Reading Tree; Ginn; Ladybird Read it Yourself

C - Story Chest; 1,2,3 and Away

*What percentage of your class resources are spent on reading related materials ?*

*Less than a quarter*

*Less than half*

*More than half*

A

C

B: could not say as Language resources bought centrally.

**Section Two - The Teaching and Learning of Literacy**

*1. How many times per week, on average, do you hear a child read/ share a book with a child ?*

1

2 (A)(B)

3

4

5 (C)

*Does this depend on the ability of the child ?*

Yes

No

C

AB

*If so, please explain*

Some days there is no time to hear fluent readers, they just change their book to take home (C).

*Please describe your practice when hearing children read/sharing a book with a child.*

A: Child selects a book to share - depending on the type of book the child either reads alone or we read together, then talk about story, pictures etc.

B: Quiet time with as few interruptions as possible. Individually close to me, sometimes a child will request to sit on my lap. Encourage the child to read the title - tell me what has happened so far, talk about the illustrations, characters etc. predict ending, what happens next.

C: Fluent and free readers choose from any books in class - discuss book, why they chose it, look for author. Children on reading scheme have their books changed (if necessary) by classroom assistant at 9.00am. If half way through discuss what has happened in story etc. Read 2 or more pages, as much as they want to read at home.







## Appendix Five

*Do you discuss the teaching of reading at this time ?*

<i>In school:</i>	Yes	No	
	AC		B: if parents ask
<i>Home visit:</i>	Yes	No	
		AC	B: if parents ask

*Is this an important and planned part of these meetings ?*

Yes	No
AC	B

2. *Do you provide any written guidance to parents about your approach to reading ?*

Yes    ABC

3. *Please describe your policy for children taking books home.*

A: Children have a plastic wallet (book pack) and a reading record book. They choose 2 books which are written into the book after the date and number 1,2, or 3 depending on whether the child can read the book (1) or it is to read together (2) or for an adult to read to them (3).

B: We encourage but the children are not forced. About 60% do every day. Once they start I explain to parents that to begin with books are shared - children join in as they wish. Build on phonic/flash cards work done at school. Often parents continue this at home.

C: Children can select any book/s in classroom to take home - must record in reading record book. (Parents aware of this) Children can select books from main school library (as long as recorded) at lunch times. Each child takes home their reading book every day with reading diary and returns it for continuing or changing.

*Do parental helpers hear children read in school ?*

Yes    ABC

*How many have helped this week ?*                    A-3, B-2, C-3

*Is this the normal amount*    Yes

### **Section Four - Assessment and Record Keeping**

1. *Do the children take any standardised reading test in their first four terms of school ?*                    No ABC

2. *Do you have any 'in house' formal reading assessment procedure ?*                    No ABC

3. *What informal reading assessment procedures do you use ?*

A: I check termly as to the child's sight vocabulary of words/sounds we have particularly looked at that term. Also check to see how many of the 'Breakthrough' words from their folder they can read.

B: All the time continually assessing their progress in decoding, phonic skills and syntax to aid unknown words, using pictures as an aid. Fluency comprehension etc.

C: I discuss their progress with them and with others who hear them read. Parents are supportive and are encouraged to comment freely in the reading diaries - this is a good indication of progress.

**4. What reading records do you keep ?**

**A:** How often a child has read to me/an adult. Which books and when , comments from parents, children etc. Which sounds/words we have studied.

**B:** Individual - book titles, date. Class - date heard, change of book. Annual report records fluency, level of interest, motivation, reading level, reading with meaning, comprehension etc.

**C:** Daily tick list. Reading Record Book with titles of books read. Personal reading diaries with comments from teacher and parents.

**Section Five**

*Please add any further information about your reading policy or practice.*

**A:** Further details of information given before children start school.

**B:** Comments about aspects of school reading policy she would like to see changed. "I am personally finding it difficult as more of the National Curriculum comes on line to maintain time for reading and parents have said - 'Please keep it as a priority I don't mind if my child doesn't do too well in some of the foundation subjects'."

**C:** I firmly believe in children starting with a reading scheme for security and confidence building .....A reading scheme does not suit all children so it is important to be flexible and I tend to adopt a principle of 'horses for courses'. I consider the regular hearing of children reading of paramount importance.

**Appendix Six: Summary of Interviews with Teachers in the First Part of the Study.**

**1. What do you hope your children will be able to do in reading by the time they leave your class ?**

**Redgate:** Children have an interest in books.  
Know a few basic words by sight.  
Understand and respect books.

**Yettington:** Phonics - initial sounds and all blends in reading and writing.  
Children enjoy books and develop confidence.

**Granville:** Children will pick up and choose books spontaneously.  
Children will read for pleasure and to find out.

**2. How soon do children have a reading book when they start at school ?**

**Redgate:** As soon as they start

**Yettington:** First day they get a Story Chest book, after 2/3 weeks when they can follow the words and talk about the pictures they get a 1,2,3 and Away book.

**Granville:** A picture book on the first day if they ask. Move on to Oxford Reading Tree after 3/4 weeks and when they have a small sight vocab.

**3. You say you use Informal methods of assessment in reading - What action do you take as a result of these Informal assessments ?**

**Redgate:** Reinforce words learned. Check Breakthrough folder words

**Yettington:** -

**Granville:** Varies according to child - move off scheme, relieve pressure, hear read more, etc.

**4. Do you vary your practice when hearing children read depending on their ability ? If so how ?**

**Redgate:** Depends on book as well as child.  
Get them to point with their finger

**Yettington:** More discussion with the less able

**Granville:** Sees the time as more than just hearing reading. Some discusses comprehension and prediction. Share comedy in pictures. Some children on lap.



**5. Which aspect of reading do you emphasise first ?  
eg word recognition, storyline, enjoyment, phonics, etc.**

**Redgate:** Enjoyment and interest. Storyline and pictures.

**Yettlington:** Phonics, enjoyment of books and confidence.

**Granville:** Meaning.

**6. Which of these do think is most important ?**

**Redgate:** Enjoyment.

**Yettlington:** Phonics, enjoyment of books and confidence.

**Granville:** Depends on the child: word recognition, enjoyment and meaning.

**7. How do you teach these ?**

**Redgate:** Encouragement: choosing a book as an extra treat.  
Breakthrough and work sheets, sound for the week and handwriting, group activities

**Yettlington:** Work sheets, flash cards of letters, I spy, incidental opportunities, lotto, Words and Pictures.

**Granville:** Word recognition: board and card games, Big Books, words around the room, phonic work sheets.

**8. Do you find that you spend less time on reading since you have had the requirements of the National Curriculum to cover ? If so, which elements of reading have you cut down on ?**

**Redgate:** N/A qualified since N.C.

**Yettlington:** No (perhaps neglects other N.C. subjects in favour of Language and Maths, considers these are so important in the early stages).

**Granville:** Yes - know the children less well, hear readers one to one less often.

**Have you done anything to make up for this ?**

Use more able to share with less able. Invite in 'mums'

**9. Have you made any other changes in practice in the last four terms ? If so what and why ?**

**Redgate:** More assessment in the Autumn term. More experiment

**Yettlington:** More developmental writing.

**Granville:** Standardised handwriting (new school policy). More emergent writing, more use of Oxford Reading Tree following introduction two years ago.

**10. What do you think is the most important thing that you do to enable children to learn to read ?**

**Redgate:** The Booktime session with parents and classroom assistant in the mornings

**Yettlington:** Enabling them to read to someone every day working as a team with home and classroom assistants.

**Granville:** Sharing of books (hearing readers and reading stories). Developing the child's sense of authorship. Developing a sense of value and love of books. Letting children see the teacher read.

**Appendix Seven:**  
**Examples of the Five Interactional Situations**

**1. Teacher Reads to Class**  
**Coverland (5) Observation 25.5.93**

<u>Child</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
24	Picks up book and shows front cover 'What's he
25	called ?'
26 Little	He is little, it means little
27 Tom	It starts like Tom
28 K: Tidy Titch	K. has told me the title of the book - it's
29	called Tidy Titch. It's a nick name, who else do
30	we know that has a different name
31 ?	No
32 ?	Who else do we know that has a name that's not
33	really their proper name
34 Biff	Biff
35 Chip	and Chip
36 Kipper	and Kipper
37	I don't know what Titch's real name is, I think
38	people call him Titch because.... what does Titch
39	mean ?
40 Little	Someone said this morning there's a titchy little
41	car. B. get the titchy little car. I heard someone
42	say that's a titchy little car. Titchy means very
43	little. ( <i>discipline</i> )
44 J.: was that me?	I think it might have been. Do you
45	remember saying it ? T. turns to book
46	It's called Tidy Titch, Tidy Titch,
47	Tidy Titch and it's written by a lady called Pat
48	Hutchins - that's the lady who wrote Rosie's Walk,
49	it's the same lady. <i>Discipline</i> - don't spoil the
50	story time ( <i>repeats</i> ). It's a quiet time now.
51 11.00	Tidy Titch by Pat Hutchins. There's lots of pages
52	before we get to the story ( <i>shows</i> ) they tell us
53	about what sort of a story its going to be - are
54	we at the start of the story yet ?
55 Yes	<i>Reads....</i> There's Titch in his room everything's
56	is in its proper place, even the cat looks tidy,
57	there's their mother - sometimes its mother,
58	sometimes it's mummy, sometimes it's mum, I
59	think it's mother in this story. And there's
60	Peter and there's Mary.
61 You've got a Mary	I've got a daughter called Mary
62	<i>Reads explains pictures</i> Mother's gone downstairs
63	He's going to help Peter and Mary ( <i>voice changes</i>
64	<i>from when reading to comment</i> )
65 S. his room's going	
66 to be messy	
67 He's wearing slippers	No I think they are sandals, summer
68	shoes.
69	<i>Reads</i> 'I'll have them' He likes saying that points



## Appendix Seven

70	to print can you say that ?
71 I'll have them	
72 I'll have them	<i>Reads..... What do you think he'll say ?</i>
73 I'll have them	<i>Reads .....Opens mouth and waits and nods</i>
74 I'll have them	
75 N. turns page	Thank you
76 Here comes mum	it's not mum in this book it's
77 Mother	We don't use that very often
78	<i>Explains picture</i>
79	And that's the end. <i>Reads list of other books by</i>
80	<i>PH, discusses whether they know them</i>
81	Maybe when we go to the library tomorrow we
82	can look for books by Pat Hutchins.

---

**2. Teacher Led Discussion**  
**Billington (4) Observation 20.5.93**

<u>Child</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1 9.13 am	<i>Focuses attention on changes since last night</i>
2	<i>to the time machine - who can read what is</i>
3	<i>written ?</i>
4 dinosaur time	<i>well done A.</i>
5 house	<i>a good try - reads his choice and points out</i>
6	<i>the arrow's hiding the 'c'</i>
7 space	
8 space etc	<i>Who knew that was space ?</i>
9 hands up	<i>Well done</i>
10	<i>We're going to make some little tickets for you to</i>
11	<i>write where you would like to go</i>
12	<i>Where would you like to go ?</i>
13 cavemen time	<i>Yes, that's a good idea</i>
14	<i>you could put that on your tickets</i>
15 my house etc	
16 to see the steam trains	
17	<i>you'd have to write <u>all</u> that on your tickets</i>
18	<i>Points above the time machine - what's the first</i>
19	<i>word up there</i>
20 baby clinic	<i>What's missing ? the b's fallen down</i>
21	<i>This is what we are going to put up goes to get and uncover easel</i>
22 time machine	
23	<i>Sign reads 'The tetractys time machine' -</i>
24 children attempt to read	
25 tetractys, sounding out	
26 and having guesses	<i>T. praises and tells them what it says</i>
27	<i>We've done some of these letters, shall I tell you</i>
28	<i>which we've done - puts dot under some letters</i>
29	<i>working through the words - we've done all this</i>
30	<i>word.</i>
31	<i>What's this letter ?</i>
32 T T T	<i>Can you draw a 't' in the air (describes as draws)</i>
33	<i>Do you know this letter? we've got one in A.</i>
34	<i>A. what letter is this - do you remember</i>
35	<i>what sound it makes ? I'll tell you what it says</i>
36	<i>'ruh' whose letter is it ?</i>
37 robber red	<i>Are there any other r's that say 'ruh'?</i>
38 " "	
39	<i>What's this one</i>
40 sammy snake	<i>sammy snake - we've done all this word - we</i>
41	<i>did this one and this one</i>
42 time, time	<i>have we done all the letters in time ? We haven't</i>
43	<i>done this one I'll put a ring round it - we've still</i>
44	<i>got all these to make for the sign. Lots more of</i>
45	<i>we've done this one we need this</i>
46	<i>one and this one etc - How many letters do we</i>
47	<i>need, count them.</i>

## Appendix Seven

48                    One group are going to make the letters - *shows*  
49                    *other things that will go in the machine*  
50 here's the baby   E., put that down - that is the 'b' from  
51                    baby - but put it down now.

---



**3. Teacher Monitoring****Billington (3) Observation 14.5.93**

## 9.46 Teacher monitoring writing group

To whom	Reason	Teacher response
41	All	F*
42		F
43		
44	V.	E*
45	Re.	E
46		
47	G	E
9.55- 10.00		

10.00 Sits apart and continues to monitor, talks about content and writes questions showing correct orthography, sometimes expects a written response.

48		D*	
49			
50			
51	P.	E	
52	fidgiting		
53		F	
54			
55	W.	D	
56	Reads writing		
57			
58			
59	V.	D	
60	Reads writing		
61			
62			
63			
64	cuH		

-----  
 Key: D = Responds to child who has finished or is looking for something to do  
 E = Teacher reacts to perceived need of individual  
 F = Teacher reacts to perceived need of class/group

**4. Teacher Working with Group**  
**Billington (4) Observation 20.5.93**

<u>Child</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
9.40	Gives out dictionaries to oldest group
72	Do you know what a dictionary is ?
73 a fact book	a fact book
74 lots of writing	lots of writing
75 interesting	interesting
76	You can look for words that you want
77	P. says encyclopaedias are like this but they
78	have different things in
-----	
97 9.54	Could you turn to the front of your dictionary,
98	look at the words on the first pages, what do
99	they begin with?
100 a	are they all beginning with 'a' on that page
101 No	Which one doesn't begin with 'a' - <i>agrees with child</i>
102	What I meant was the ones in the black print
103	they all begin with 'a' - but I don't want to look
104	for words beginning with 'a's, I want one
105	beginning with 'duh', guess which one I want
106 dog	No but it could be
107 dinosaur	he's got it - see if you can find the word that
108	says dinosaur
109 Children search	Look on that page and all the
110 some find	other words that are in black print
111	Do you know what letter dinosaur begins with
112	Re. ?
113	You've found the 'd' for dinosaur
114	<i>Helps G. who has turned over two pages,</i>
115	what happened when you turned over - put your
116	finger on the word which is dinosaur
117	<i>Shows alphabet on the Breakthrough stand</i>
118	What do we call the abcdefgh
119 abc	
120 alphabet	the alphabet always comes in the same order -
121	we say it and sing it sometimes
122	What's the very last letter
123 zed	Where do you find words beginning with 'zed' in
124	your dictionary
125 at the end	at the very end
126 I haven't got a 'zed'	Are there words beginning with
127	'zed' in your dictionary - helps to find - if you
128	wanted to find words beginning with 'zed' you
129	wouldn't go to the beginning
130	Where would you find words beginning with 'a'
131 at the beginning	
132 at the beginning	
133	<i>T. moves around individuals: Where would you</i>
134	<i>find words beginning with (gives individual letter</i>
135	<i>to individual children)</i>
136	<i>To all : can you find an apple</i>

## Appendix Seven

137 Well done *etc*  
138 there's not one in here *T. looks* - I don't think there is one  
139 in there, is there in this one ?  
140 *To all:* you're very clever you can find words  
141 beginning with 'a' and with 'z', look at my  
142 alphabet, refers to mud poem, where do you  
143 think words beginning with 'm' are  
144 Children find mud Shall I read what it says about mud  
145 I'm going to read it; *reads ..... inc: mud goes*  
146 *hard when it is dry.* In some countries they  
147 build houses made of mud. I'll show you  
148 something - gets margarine tubs - tells to  
149 put books away so that they don't get dirty  
150 Children look at and feel the mud.

---



**5. Teacher Hearing Readers**  
**Coverland (2) Observation 12.5.93**

<u>Child</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
66 Peter	Did you read to your Mum or Dad
67	Let's have it again, what's it called
68 about dog	Have you got a dog at yourhouse
69	Off they go down the road
70	<i>(Reads with P. when he hesitates)</i>
71	It's called Park Road - points topicture - do you
72	think there's a park in it
73	It's a scary story, it's called a ghost story
74	That's a lovely story - would you like to choose
75	another one to take home ?
76 11.30	Let's see what book M.'s got - <i>M. shows</i>
77	<i>book.</i>
78	Let's see what P. has chosen - My House -
79	<i>Teacher reads and points P. and M. watch</i>
80	'full house' - it is a full house it is full of bees
-----	
81 M. reading Grand Old Duke of York	
82	Did you read with your brother
83 reads	You could almost sing this couldn't you
84 I like this	you like this do you
85 Look at all of them	Thousands - they've all got black boot
86	and trousers on
87	<i>T. reads with child</i>
88 N. watches	<i>T. sings text and points</i>
89 M. chooses another book	'It's called bedtime'
90 Comments often on text	<i>T. does not always respond</i>
91	That says goodnight what do you say in the
92	morning ?
93 N. still watching	Would you like to take a book home
94	tonight N? Shall I find a bag for you
95	N. - Come on to the reading chair
96	Turn over N. see what happens -
97	Where have they gone, they have all gone
98	away haven't they. What's happening on that
99	page, oh look what's happened ( <i>voice indicates</i>
100	<i>laughter</i> )
101	Do you think you could keep it in your locker

**Appendix Eight: Billington 30.4.93**School: BillingtonDate: 30.4.93Time: 9.30 - 12.00**ONE. Big Book session whole class 9.36 - 9.45**

9	Takes up big book	Do you remember what we call
10		these ? ( <i>read together book</i> )
11	Opens title page	What page is this ?
12		You think it should be number 0?
13	Turns to next page	Let's see what this page is.
14		<i>Discusses numbering</i>
15		<i>Reads together with children</i>
16	Children read 'jumped'	
17	for 'paddled'	<i>Teacher stops and feigns shock</i>
18	'paddled'	How do we know it is paddled ?
19	Ch. read 'oh' for 'just'	
20	Ch. read 'she said'	Does it say 'said'
21	Ch. 'screamed'	
22	Picture of cow in the bath	Is he enjoying it ?
23	Ch. I've seen a three	That'd it be really hard to get out of
24	legged cat	the bath ( <i>previously said it would be</i>
25		<i>hard to get the cow out.</i>
26	Read: Wishy washy	Do you notice anything about those
27	wishy washy	words ?
28		<i>Talks about 'sh' as in keep quiet</i>
29		( <i>Penultimate page</i> ) What do you think they are going to do now ?

-----  
Interview - Billington30th April 1993

16 mins

Tape 1B 094-304

Added to 6 th May

Tape 1B 304-

*I'm thinking particularly when you were doing the Mrs Wishy Washy story - what were you thinking when you were doing that ?*

- 1 I wanted to reinforce - you could see that it wasn't the first
- 2 Read Together book - I want them to know these books well so
- 3 that when they take the little books home they can read
- 4 them and feel real readers. And I'm trying - if it was the
- 5 first time that I'd read one we would have read it really
- 6 really for the story but you could see that I was willing to
- 7 stop much more than I might have been on reading it for the
- 8 first time and point out different things in it. I'm trying to
- 9 get them aware of things like a title of a book and where we
- 10 start, that was bringing in the youngest in the class who is
- 11 very immature, he only turned five in the holidays and
- 12 trying to get them to look at the print as we go along to
- 13 notice different things, drawing their attention to some letters
- 14 and some (phonic?) words and not overdoing that so that you
- 15 lose the s....., if I'm really doing a sort of phonics thing then



## Appendix Eight

16 it's something much shorter during modelling writing or  
17 something like that and I don't want to spoil the story and I  
18 want to keep the momentum going. I chose that one because  
19 it tied in with the mud and I just feel that this corporate  
20 saying of the story is very useful, a corporate way of a lot of  
21 children looking at print together - well it is so difficult fitting  
22 in reading with children separately so I do think that this is  
23 one of the ways that we can.

*There was a little thing that happened during that time that was very typical - I don't know if you remember it - somebody suddenly came out with something about a three legged cat and you said that'd be harder to get out looking at the bath and talking about getting the animals out. Were you thinking anything at that time ?*

24 I did consider asking a bit more about it but I felt that we  
25 were going to lose the flow completely of the story if we went  
26 off into three legged cats and that kind of thing - sometimes  
27 you go down those roads when you're really trying in a  
28 session but I thought no I don't really want so that was why -  
29 I wanted to respond but I didn't want to go down the road of  
30 every named animal .....

*Which thing did you think was particularly successful, either as a group thing or the one particular child where something had just clicked ?*

79 I'm really quite pleased at the way these 'read together'  
80 books are coming on, I'm really quite pleased at the way they  
81 respond to and know about some of the things. And when  
82 they said 'w' , somebody muttered 'water-witch' which was  
83 the 'w' we were doing the day before, which is actually why I  
84 picked out Mrs Wishy Washy and that was Vicky (?) and that  
85 was someone who has had trouble with her phonics and I did  
86 mentally note that.



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