

Chapter 9

Classroom Cultures and the Ethnographic Experience

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Abstract This chapter explores how ethnographers study classrooms and schools to produce ‘peopled’ ethnographies written up into ‘luminous’ descriptions. The starting point is four incidents recorded by ethnographic observers in one school during the first (original) Oracle project. These four incidents are the basis for an exemplification of how an ethnographer could derive six working hypotheses with rich research potential, to move towards an ethnography of that school (or any school). The importance of fighting familiarity, writing detailed field notes, analysing the data and writing up into vivid accounts is all stressed. Gathering data on recurrent and persistent features of classroom interaction and school life, such as teacher control, lesson preparation, the timescapes of teacher careers, sexism, ethnocentricism or xenophobia and the ‘contemporary legends’ that pupils share about the next school they are due to attend is illustrated in the examples. Examples of published studies that an ethnographer could read to embed their research are included.

Keywords Ethnography • Field notes • Folklore • Foreshadowed problems • Classrooms • Staffrooms • Luminous description • Timekeeping • Control • Sexism

Preface

I have known Maurice Galton since 1969 when I was a PhD student, and I coedited a *Festschrift* for him in 2011 (Hargreaves et al. 2011). If anyone had said to me in 1969 that a volume celebrating Maurice Galton would *mention* ethnography, I would have been surprised. The idea of a whole chapter would have seemed highly unlikely because the research philosophy he then espoused was a positivist one, based on producing statistics from coding classroom behaviour using a schedule (Croll 1986). Yet 17 years later, we published an ethnographic monograph (Delamont and Galton 1986), and by then the idea of this chapter would not have been strange at all.

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Introduction

The chapter is structured so that it begins with real ethnographic data gathered by Maurice Galton, myself and other members of the first Oracle project in the 1970s (Galton and Willcocks 1983; Delamont and Galton 1986). It builds on the data to show the power and potential of ethnography to explore educational settings. The best way to introduce the ethnography of classrooms is to transport the reader into a classroom via vivid descriptions of the interaction patterns drawn from the field notes. So that is the thing that I have done. The writing of good field notes, their analysis and the subsequent written accounts are the basic foundational tools of the ethnographer. Now come with me to Guy Mannering (9–13) School in the town of Ashburton as it was in September 1977.

Ashburton 1977

Ashburton is the pseudonym we (the first Oracle project team) (see Delamont and Galton 1986) gave to a town in the English Midlands, when we did ethnographic research on the first month in the lives of a cohort of girls and boys, aged 9, entering two (9–13) comprehensive middle schools. The old town was growing rapidly, with new housing encouraging families to move there from Birmingham and London. The local education authority had moved from the old English system (established in 1944) of primary schools for 5–11-year-olds and then either grammar schools for 11–18-year-olds, with admission for about 30 per cent of the cohort based on an exam (the 11+) and secondary modern 11–16 schools for the remaining 70%, to a comprehensive system. They had reorganised to have lower schools for 5–8-year-olds, middle schools for 9–13-year-olds and then upper schools for those from 14 onwards. The middle schools were either newly built or were ‘converted’ secondary modern schools. The upper schools were in the premises of the former grammar schools, which had the best facilities (such as science laboratories) and graduate teachers used to preparing pupils for public exams at 16 and at 18. We studied Gryll Grange, one of the new built schools with a staff appointed specifically to teach 9–13-year-olds, and Guy Mannering, housed in what had been a girls’ secondary modern, which had kept many of the staff from its previous incarnation. Guy Mannering had ability grouping, and a ‘house’ system, where pupils across all 4 years were divided into four competing organisations to which it was hoped they would feel loyal and so wish to compete for good attendance, behaviour and academic achievement ‘merit’ points and in sport.

In September 1977, we joined Guy Mannering alongside a cohort of 9-year-olds (see Galton and Willcocks 1983; Delamont and Galton 1986). To introduce the ethnographic approach, and in the first Oracle project, there were many other research approaches used as well. I have focused on extracts from field notes taken by several members of the research team at Guy Mannering. The first month of the school year

is an excellent time to see the start of the construction of the social order between each teacher and each class. I have picked out here notes on two male teachers, Mr. Le Gard and Mr. Woolfe (these are both pseudonyms). Mr. Le Gard was in his last year of teaching; Mr. Woolfe had been redeployed to Guy Mannering and was very quickly labelled as incompetent by his new colleagues. Mr. Le Gard taught religious studies and ‘library’ (a sort of study skills course) in the school library. Mr. Woolfe taught art. In religious studies, Mr. Le Gard relied on putting passages of text up on his blackboard on Monday and having every class copy them out, amplified by lists from their bibles, across all the week’s lessons. I have focused here on two of his ‘library’ classes, the first of which was on how to read a timetable.

He hands them out some red books and says that they are going to do an exercise on time-tables, which ‘are always regarded as being complicated’ but ‘they are not once you find your way around’. They are to open the red textbooks at a page which has a timetable for a bus route from Eastbourne to Hastings.

These are two seaside towns on the south east coast of England. Mr. Le Gard explained

We have the page from the bus timetable, the first information you get is the number of the bus. That’s useful. Then it tells you where it goes from Eastbourne: Pevensey, Bexhill, and Hastings. That’s general, now we get to the timetable itself.

Mr. Le Gard then explained how to read a bus timetable and told the children to work through the ten questions on the schedule in the book. For example: ‘What time does the 8.20 bus reach Hastings?’ After 10 min, Mr. Le Gard read out the answers, so the children could mark their own books. He then asked ‘Who had ten right?’ and so on down to none. All the boys reported getting seven or more out of ten correct. Two girls, Mair and Leila, said they each got ten; some girls admitted only achieving two, three or four correct answers. Mr. Le Gard went on

Apart from Mair and Leila the old thing has come up again, that a man can use a timetable better than a woman.

On another occasion Mr. Le Gard was teaching the same class of 9-year-olds about ‘The Book’.

He tells them that on the title page there will be the author’s name, and that tells you something about the book. ‘You may recognise the author and therefore know he is a good one. If you got a chemistry book by a senior master at a big school he might know what he is talking about, but if it is by someone who is just a housewife, well!’

Most of the field notes the Oracle team collected about Mr. Le Gard describe largely quiet, uneventful lessons during which Mr. Le Gard read the paper at his desk while the children were copying notes from the board and their bibles. However these two extracts come from classes which stand out as among the most blatantly sexist, stereotyped teaching we heard or saw throughout the whole Oracle fieldwork over 2 years in six schools.

Mr. Woolfe was one of a team of seven art and craft teachers who had eight groups each of 20 pupils in a set of rooms grouped round a central area, in which the eighth ‘class’ were seated without a teacher doing ‘theory’ – actually practising

italic handwriting from workbooks – for 80 min. The washrooms in the area were kept locked in the first month of the school year, so these children could not wash their hands before or after cookery, craft, needlework or art unless a teacher made time for cleaning up and unlocked them for one group of children to use. Our observations of Mr. Woolfe's classes were, frankly, embarrassing. The field notes made by team members are replete with observations about Mr. Woolfe's shortcomings: quite unlike the majority of the notes which are much more dispassionate in tone. In one double lesson, he began by being late, apologising, saying he had a task to finish (he had to sort out his form's dinner money and get it into the office) but had no activity to occupy the class while he dealt with that. This meant the children had nothing to do and became restless and bored at the beginning of an 80-min lesson. Finally, the observer records:

He begins. He asks them why artists can see more than others. There is general puzzlement at this question, but Howard says it's because they are good at imagining. There are no other offerings so Mr. Woolfe says 'Well we must get on, so you will have to think about that question', and doesn't answer his own question at all.

The lesson involves drawing trees, but Mr. Woolfe does not take them out to look at the different species growing in the school's grounds.

He tells them that if they had time they could go out and look at trees and see what different shapes were like.

He apologises to the children for his lack of preparation.

As I say, I haven't had time to prepare this lesson, so I will need some help from you.

Mr. Woolfe was so unprepared that the whole of the first 40 min had elapsed before everyone was equipped with a brush, paper, a stick of charcoal, a painting board, a palette and a share of a water-pot.

The observer left, went to another craft class and returned near the end of the double lesson. Mr. Woolfe's timing was wrong, so he sent the children off late to math without washing their hands. Their math teacher Mrs. Forrest, who was also the form teacher of most of the children, was visibly shocked by their unwashed hands and, in a manner very unlike normal references by one teacher to another, said 'Well I had better come along next week and see what you are doing'. The following week, the class again overran, so Mr. Woolfe had to tidy the space after they had gone, and again they had no chance to wash their hands. Mr. Woolfe was also teaching art without providing any aprons or getting the children to bring something from home to protect their brand new, expensive, school uniforms from the paint. Mrs. Forrest commented to one girl that if she was her mother: 'I'd go mad at the state of your uniform' which would need to be washed that night because of the art lesson.

These are, of course, unusual extracts from our field notes about the lives of 9-year-olds at Guy Mannering in 1977. For every Mr. Le Gard offering pure prejudice as if it were scientific or biblical truth, there are pages and pages of field notes on 'ordinary' lessons in math, English, history, geography and science. For every Mr. Le Gard sitting, reading or marking while classes copied from the board, there

were detailed accounts of teachers energetically teaching their classes. When researchers read and analyse their field notes, the unusual teachers and lessons often stand out, precisely because they *are* unusual and make a more vivid text for publication. I have chosen these four classes taught by two men as a starting point to demonstrate the working methods of school ethnographers.

Making the Familiar Strange

All classroom ethnographers have to work very hard to focus productively on the many ‘uneventful’ lessons they see every day and draw out of them important insights into the interaction they capture. Howard Becker (1971) pointed out that classrooms were ‘familiar’, and watching them needed hard work to produce decent social science. It is precisely because educational researchers have to make the familiar strange that classroom observation with schedules or by ethnography is such hard work (Geer 1964). The history of the familiarity problem and strategies to fight familiarity can be found in Atkinson et al. (2010) and Delamont (2012a, b, c). Ethnographic field notes are analysed (today they are often coded and a software package such as NVIVO is used), and many hours of observation and many pages of notes are the basis from which to produce written accounts for papers and books. Ethnographers usually work hard to produce ‘interesting’ accounts of educational settings.

There is a large literature on how to conduct an ethnography, both general (such as Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) and specific to educational settings (Delamont 2002). There are large generic handbooks (e.g. Atkinson et al. 2001) and education-specific ones (Delamont 2012b) which have chapters on a variety of topics such as taking field notes, analysis or writing. A novice can find advice on all the stages of an ethnographic project via those citations. This chapter does not recapitulate basic information on ethnography methods per se but instead focuses upon the process that most puzzles ‘outsiders’, which is how an ethnographer follows up ‘leads’ and therefore decides what to look at, what conversations to have with the informants next and how to build up from an incident towards a more general picture of the wider social processes.

It is easier to write vividly about pupils or teachers whose behaviour is unusual, such as Mr. Le Gard, who not only offered a sexist view of the world but also refused to call a boy with the Italian family name of ‘Radice’ by its proper pronunciation of ‘Radiche’ and insisted despite the boy’s protests in calling him ‘Radish’ (We have used pseudonyms for this family who eventually gave up the struggle with Guy Mannering. The whole family changed their name to ‘Radley’ 6 months later). However the whole point of ethnographic work is to use the field notes on striking incidents like the ‘timetable’ exercise to focus upon what is being taught and what is being learnt, by real teachers and by real children in actual classrooms. It frequently transpires that the content and the processes of ‘education’ bear little rela-

tion to the national policies, or the school plans are done not according to the official syllabus but in the densely packed co-construction of the classroom *milieux*.

Particularly vivid material about unusual or even eccentric teachers, or especially deviant pupils, also has an important function in educational ethnography. It contrasts with the 'normal' behaviour of the majority of teachers and pupils and the routine mundanely of most lessons in most schools on most days. A 'failing' teacher like Mr. Woolfe is desperately embarrassing to observe, but his lack of competence is contrastive with the many lessons which begin and end promptly, and from which *nothing* emerges that fellow teachers can use to judge their colleague. In Mr. Woolfe's classes, we could see failure to plan or prepare entirely dysfunctional questions to pupils, a lack of organisational skills and very poor timekeeping.

The observer commented that Mr. Woolfe 'allows them to call out without putting up their hands, something that the more experienced teachers would never allow here at Guy Mannering'. That is exactly the type of insight into the social order of a school which forces the researcher to focus upon what the 'normal' classroom in that school is like and how it is achieved, rather than taking it for granted. Mr. Woolfe also allowed 'quite a lot of noise while they are organising their equipment' and that comment by the observer, too, is revealing about the norms in other classrooms at Guy Mannering.

From Oracle to General Strategies

In the rest of the chapter, the focus is on how ethnographers work, and the general principles are illustrated by reference to Mr. Le Gard and Mr. Woolfe. The first Oracle project was not primarily ethnographic: the data were intended to be illustrative and supplementary to the systematic coding, the test scores and the interviews. One of my frustrations with the first Oracle project was that I did not fully appreciate the difficulties of conducting a multisite team ethnography when several of the researchers in the team had not been trained. The research associates had been carefully trained to use the coding schedules, and their time learning the schedules was paid for, but they were not systematically prepared to write ethnographic field notes. Indeed all the team members who were going to use the coding schedules had training, so there was interobserver reliability. As the experienced ethnographer, I should have organised paid training, in field note writing for all the observers. In retrospect there should have been training in how to generate what Geertz (1973) called 'thick description'. In essence the rest of the chapter addresses what needed to be in the training of the Oracle research team (but was not), using the Oracle data to explore what might have been. So in this chapter, I have demonstrated the power of ethnographic research by building on the fragments of data on Mr. Le Gard and Mr. Woolfe already presented to explore what a fully formed ethnographic study of Guy Mannering School could have produced if ethnography had been the main research method, if it had lasted for 3–6 months, and been done by one or two experienced

field workers. In the rest of the chapter, I have explored what was and what might have been, after a little on the process of ethnography.

The Process of Ethnography

I have written about ethnographic methods elsewhere (Delamont 2002, 2012a, b, c) and have summarised the key points here. Good ethnography starts with reading, to develop foreshadowed problems that challenge familiarity. In ethnography, the foreshadowed problems are the equivalent of the hypotheses used in survey or quasi-experimental research but are not as constraining (Geer 1964). If the field setting turns out to make them irrelevant, they are reformulated and even replaced. The access negotiations in an ethnographic project are a vital source of insight and form part of the data gathering. They can reveal a great deal about the setting: what the actors in the setting regard as ‘too dull’ or ‘too sensitive’ is itself informative. The teacher who forbids the ethnographer to come into her room can be used as a source of data that are as revealing about the school as the one who makes the observer welcome.

Once in the classroom, the ethnographer has to write the most detailed field notes possible: the layout of the space, the items on the walls, the location(s) of the actors, the heat or cold, the smell(s), the noise or the silence. What people wear and what objects are used legitimately, misused and illicitly present all need to be meticulously noted in every lesson. In a classroom, the ethnographer or ethnographic team needs to learn how the teacher, or the teachers, of the class understand their job and its context and to make sense of the pupils’ or students’ perspectives. Some of these will be common; others will be shared by subgroups, or be individual or even idiosyncratic. The ethnographer operates by observing and then asking the participants about what is happening, why it happens, how they make sense of it, not usually in formal interviews but in casual conversations embedded in the setting.

The mission of ethnography is to understand how a culture, subculture or micro-culture like a classroom is socially co-constructed by the participants in it and how those people make sense of their lives. The seven principles of ‘peopled ethnography’ set out by Fine (2003) and Brown-Saracino et al. (2008) sum up the philosophy used in most educational projects, and Katz (2001, 2002) provides an inspiring account of how ethnographic data should be written up. Fine (2003) reflecting on the eight separate ethnographic projects he had completed (from mushroom hunters to high school debating teams) stressed that the term ‘peopled ethnography’ was a ‘happy’ label for his approach, which is to focus on three core concepts in the setting: culture, interaction and social structure. His seven pillars are:

1. That the ethnography is theoretical.
2. That it builds on other ethnographies.
3. That examines interacting small groups.
4. That it relies on multiple research sites.

5. That it depends on extensive, labour-intensive, observation.
6. That it is richly ethnographic.
7. That it distances researcher and researched.

Fine's sixth principle draws on Katz's (2001, 2002) arguments about the requirement that ethnographers should produce 'luminous' description.

If Oracle had been an ethnographic project, of the type valued by Fine and Katz, the observation team would have built on the initial observations of Mr. Le Gard and Mr. Woolfe to pursue further investigations of everyday classroom life at Guy Mannering, along the lines I have suggested in what follows, or others similarly envisaged.

In each example, references are provided to the sorts of study that ethnographers would read during the research to help them focus the project using these incidents with Mr. Le Gard and Mr. Woolfe as the triggers for the next set of observations and conversations. Some of the probable 'foreshadowed problems' or 'working hypotheses' that might have led to a well-rounded study of Guy Mannering are explored below. They are only examples, and many other lines of enquiry could be chosen to develop fine ethnographic research.

Working Hypothesis 1

The first working hypothesis is that teacher control, as commonly practiced at Guy Mannering, produces very different classroom interaction from that seen in Mr. Woolfe's classes. That is, the ethnographer sets out to explore if Mr. Woolfe's regime is an 'outlier', an exception to the norm. This is not straightforward to research because teachers who have control are rarely able to discuss how they achieve it as (Payne and Hustler 1980, p. 49) pointed out.

Experienced teachers may well manage their classes in such taken for granted ways that they are not consciously aware of the nature of their accomplishment.

The level of pupil noise and allowing pupils to call out without raising their hands were 'unusual' features of Mr. Woolfe's classes compared to all other Guy Mannering teachers and/or the other teachers of practical and craft subjects. An ethnographer who had comments to that effect should set out to look systematically whether those propositions are 'true' – focusing on what the 'tolerated' (by the teacher) noise levels are, in the heart of the lesson and at the ends, and on whether other staff did 'allow' pupils to call out answers, rather than regularly saying 'put your hand up, please' or something similar. The literature on noise and how it is treated by colleagues as a proxy for *wider* control issues (e.g. Denscombe 1984a, b; Beynon 1987) would be used to help the researcher's thinking. The issue would be raised with other teachers – 'Do you find you have to teach them to put up their hands before they answer a question?' or 'Do today's 9-year-olds seem very noisy or is it just I'm getting old?' might be ways to open the topic with Mr. Woolfe's col-

leagues – or more specifically ‘I notice *you’re* very clear that getting all the equipment out is to be done in silence’ or ‘I see lots of hands waving wanting to answer your questions’.

The main generalisation about the ethnographic method to be noted is that, as well as observation and reading, the researcher needs to talk (not do formal interviews) with the staff. Ethnography involves a lot of informal talk.

Working Hypothesis 2

The second working hypothesis is that the pupils, even aged only nine and in the first month at Guy Mannering, would have developed clear opinions about Mr. Woolfe’s classroom performance within a few days. These could also be researched, although access to schools is normally granted on the explicit agreement that pupils will not be asked to evaluate their teachers. Many researchers have actually been given implicit or explicit evaluations of teachers by pupils. Beynon (1985) and Beynon and Atkinson (1984), for example, had 11-year-old boys explaining how they set out to ‘test’ their new teachers and find out who could and could not keep order. Gannaway (1976) is a classic paper on how secondary school pupils judged the effectiveness of their teacher focused on how the ‘good’ teachers succeeded at keeping control, being interesting and being fair.

Good ethnographers use a variety of methods to learn how pupils see their schools and may not need to ask explicitly. One source of insight into pupils’ perceptions of teachers and teaching that ethnographers can utilise is the children’s ‘folklore’ or the contemporary legends that circulate in their ‘secret world’. There is, in the UK, a rich vein of contemporary folklore which circulates among children before they transfer to the next stage of their schooling. The pretransfer scary stories are one source of insight. To take two examples of stories told about teachers that children were going to meet after transfer, collected in 2002, the reader ‘meets’ a fierce male and a woman unable to keep order:

The Fierce: Before I went to Holmarket High School in 1996 I was told by my brother that the RE teacher (who was nicknamed RAMBO) threw bibles at pupils

And the Feeble: Before I went to Eckenham School in 1995 I was told by my brother they used to lock the RE teacher in the book cupboard until she cried!!!

These two contrasting transfer stories convey perfectly the two extremities of teacher’s hardest task, discipline, keeping order, getting social control. The first is a common stereotype from the transfer stories: the mythical teacher who is, himself (and it is usually a man), out of control, who abuses the teacher role with unacceptable levels of violence, and the victim, the teacher who is at the mercy of the whim of pupils. The stereotypes and caricatures in the contemporary legends can be explored with individual or small groups of children to ‘discover’ their understanding about the control regime(s) they are experiencing.

Working Hypothesis 3

A third lead to follow up would be the administrative tasks UK teachers are required to perform and how their competence is judged by colleagues and pupils. If the researcher thought that Mr. Woolfe was unusually poor at doing his administration as a form master, and at preparing for his lessons, that would also be a useful way to focus on how the other staff ‘managed’ these parts of their job. It would be easy to focus observations on other form teachers on the day dinner money was collected, seeing how they recorded it and delivered it to the school office. It would also be straightforward to hang out in the office, ‘help’ with the reception of the dinner money and see how many teachers were ‘late’. Casanova’s (1991) ethnography of secretarial staff in American elementary schools would provide a guide for that approach.

Working Hypothesis 4

A fourth aspect to explore could be a related but more teaching-centred topic; that of preparing lessons adequately. The ethnographer who found Mr. Woolfe woefully unprepared could decide to focus on how other staff (including Mr. Le Gard) were prepared or were more skilful at appearing to the children to be prepared. That would involve concentrating on the beginnings of lessons and on transitions between activities and responses to children who finished a task more quickly than the bulk of the class. Here Ball et al. (1984) would be a guide. In the Oracle research, we did focus on ‘speed merchants and slow coaches’ (pupils who worked ‘too fast’ or ‘too slowly’), and the same data can be read to explore how well prepared the staff were.

Working Hypothesis 5

Mr. Le Gard was not only prone to expressing sexist remarks, unlikely to encourage young women to work on spatial tasks or chemistry, but was also the least receptive to a pupil with an ‘unusual’ name. Mr. Le Gard was not the only teacher who refused to pronounce Gavin Radiche’s surname in the correct way – as an Italian name – but he was the most prominent refuser, insisting on calling Gavin ‘Mr. Radish’ in a scornful voice. An ethnographer who decided to investigate how far this refusal to recognise a ‘foreign’ name was indicative of xenophobic attitudes in the school, among teachers, pupils and others would have to proceed carefully but it could be done. Ashburton was changing rapidly in the 1970s, with many new families arriving, and a line of enquiry about the teachers’ response(s) to those changes would be a useful starting point. In the case of the Radiche family, the parents came to the school to request that Gavin’s name be correctly pronounced by staff (and therefore

by pupils). The response in the staffroom was, when we were present, hostile. The staff regarded the parents as ‘pretentious’ and over-refined, unwilling to recognise or accept that their name was, in English Ashburton, ‘Radish’. In the UK, a TV comedy show some years later includes a woman whose surname was spelled Bucket who insisted it be pronounced ‘Boo-Kay’ (as if spelt Bouquet), and a Yorkshire surname Sidebottom is the source of jokes about pretentious people who inside it be pronounced ‘Siddy-Bottome’. The staff’s response to the Radiches’ requests would have been a way into exploring more general attitudes to the parents of their pupils, who were overwhelmingly white English working and lower middle class.

Working Hypothesis 6

In the previous five proposed ways an ethnographer could follow up incidents from the four lessons presented earlier in the chapter, the possible directions are obvious from the data. The last example is based on knowledge public in the school but not mentioned to the children in any specific lesson we observed. It widens the focus to bigger issues such as time, career and status in the school.

Mr. Le Gard was due to retire at the end of the 1977–1978 year. An ethnographer might decide that, after watching Mr. Le Gard, it would be interesting to focus on the ages, the career cycle stage and the life cycle stage of teachers and how those had an impact on the pupils. Peterson’s (1964) classic study of women teachers in their 20s, 40s and 60s provides several working hypotheses that could be followed by an ethnographer in Guy Mannering. Observing patterns of seating in the staff room(s), trade union membership, and participation in extracurricular activities and listening to the teachers’ talk in the classrooms with that topic in mind could produce a valuable ethnography of teachers. Reading for such a project would include Datnow (1998) who, for example, found a group of older male teachers with strong links to the powerful figures in the local community who shared an ideology about student ability and de-railed a de-streaming initiative because they believed pupil abilities were biologically fixed.

Conclusions

The chapter has demonstrated how classroom ethnographers go about their research, by suggesting six lines of enquiry that could follow from four short incidents recorded during the original Oracle project. Schools are remarkably stable at the classroom level, and there is no reason to believe that such strategies, sparked off by early encounters between pupils and their new teachers, would not be equally relevant in 2014. It is important to note that ethnographic work *on* classrooms is not confined *to* classrooms: the six possible lines of enquiry all involve focusing on

other actors and other locations in the school, such as the office staff. Obviously in a real ethnography of classroom cultures at Guy Mannering the researcher would also talk to Mr. Le Gard and Mr. Woolfe as much as possible, but this chapter concentrates on using the four incidents as contrastive with the normal patterns of teaching and learning there, which would be of more lasting importance. Good ethnographers read widely before and after as well as during data collection; try to make the familiar strange, write detailed field notes and aim to produce vivid descriptions of classroom life. The central concern of the classroom ethnographer is to grasp the ways in which the participants make sense of *their* co-construction, and some normal strategies to do that have been illustrated based on Galton's own work.

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