

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
EDUCATION

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

A TEACHER'S ENQUIRY INTO CHANGE, OVER TIME, IN HIS  
PERCEIVING OF DEVELOPMENTS IN A SCHOOL'S FUNCTIONING

by David Julian Warren Hill

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ABSTRACT  
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This is a teacher's enquiry in to change which has occurred in his thinking during an important period of development in his school. This period is also marked by changes in his views on philosophy and the effect this had on his involvement in the developments in the school. The origins of the thesis lie in his interest in philosophy. Significant alteration in this interest occurred when he attended seminars on philosophy and education at Southampton University.

Papers, correspondence, and accounts of issues are included, but not necessarily chronologically; most have been written over about five years, though, for illustration, references are made to occurrences during ten years.

Part I reviews early development; a closed, almost exclusively positivistic, analytical approach - influenced by a scientific background and a predominantly analytical course in philosophy of education during training - opens up on discovery of metaphysics and systems thinking.

Part II contains papers illustrating opening of the teacher's thinking through increasing awareness of metaphysical closure. For example, chapter 9 discusses conflict between A.J Ayer's logical positivism - of early significance to the teacher - and R.G Collingwood's metaphysics: a major influence later.

Part III outlines the history of the school as a context for Part IV.

Part IV covers some of the teacher's actions regarding issues in the school. It begins with an overview, Chapter 14, of a period when the teacher pursued his enquiry and concerned himself with a frequently troubled time in the school. The issues regarding evangelicism, Chapter 15, and the prep., Chapter 18, illustrate how the teacher overestimated the potential of locally powerful systematic logic for changing other minds. The discipline issue, Chapter 16, illustrates development towards an application of more considered thinking which includes some metaphysics and systemic reasoning.

Part V illustrates change in the teacher's thinking, partly by comparing words: some which were significant before, and early in, the enquiry, and others which became significant later

Part IV is a summary of some conclusions; it summarises change in the school, and suggests - with reference to suppositions particularly - why the teacher feels he has had little influence on change there.

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For reasons which will become obvious on reading parts of this thesis, I have not mentioned the school or anyone in it by name. In spite of the many disagreements I have had about issues within the school, I nevertheless regard it as a very good school, and I suggest this is born out by my having worked there for sixteen years. Indeed, the fact that disagreements such as those I describe were openly aired is, in my view, a mark of the school's strength. Although I have been critical of some individuals in, and some aspects of, the school, I am nevertheless aware that I owe an immense debt to the school for which I have a high regard.

I am grateful to Professor P.J. Kelly, of Southampton University, who, since Mr. Brookes retired and moved away, kindly acted as my local supervisor.

I am also greatly indebted to Mrs. S. Parhar who not only typed the contents and much more, but also painstakingly modified and amended the script, three times.

## PREFACE

This account includes a mixture of theory - acquired largely during the enquiry - and my perceptions of what happened in relation to particular issues which arose in the school.

The account is entirely personal. It is about personal change in thinking which originates in a private interest in philosophy. It is also about issues which have affected my personal context. Consequently I acknowledge that what I offer is entirely dependent upon my perception of my experience; my frequent use of the first person singular is intended to indicate how I regard my perception and thought, and hence my experience, as being peculiar to me.

The account is rather long for various reasons.

First, it refers to change which has taken place over a period of years.

Secondly, it is written with the belief that when regarding change it is important to consider some of the context of that change. Hence I have tried to provide a context, not only for the whole enquiry, but also for individual issues within it.

Thirdly, I regard it as important not only to support theory with examples from practice, but also to set the examples in context.

Fourthly, because the main parts of the enquiry, Parts II, IV and V are long - for the reasons given -, the introduction, Part I, is long.

Fifthly, it seemed appropriate to include material such as: Chapter 7, "Philosophy and my work (1985); " Chapter 14, "An overview of some significant aspects of

the course of the enquiry"; Chapter 19, "My perception of change in my thinking and acting since starting this enquiry"; and Chapter 20, "A summary of conclusions." All these chapters attempt to maintain a theme of development of thought while simultaneously holding the enquiry together; in holding a long enquiry together there is, almost inevitably, some repetition.

Sixthly, Part IV is a collection of independent accounts about actual issues: as such, in some cases, they duplicate information.

Seventhly, in an attempt to make the parts and chapters more accessible, I have provided each part with a brief preface and contents list of headings.

### Positivism and Metaphysics

In this enquiry I describe my early views on philosophy as having been influenced towards a predominantly analytical, positivistic approach.

By analysis I mean the resolution of issues and entities into simpler parts. When doing this I attached importance to clarifying the meanings of what seemed to be key words within any particular context.

By positivistic I mean having regard almost exclusively for positive facts and observable phenomena, and rejecting metaphysics and beliefs in unprovable propositions. In my early work I sought to resolve what I perceived as problems by recourse to the examination of facts and the meanings of relevant words, and the application of sound reasoning. As a result of this I found it hard to be tolerant of some of the behaviour and views of others, and I found it hard to accept the degree to which conflict existed between people within the context of my work as a teacher.

I feel that as a result of this enquiry I am now better able to understand, tolerate and, in some cases, cope with some of this conflict. I still believe in the utility of analysis at appropriate levels, but I have become aware that some phenomena, including some which arise as the result of interactings of human minds, are holistic in nature and hence by no means entirely susceptible to analysis.

I still believe in the importance of trying to establish facts, but of particular significance to me now is the realization that no phenomenon can be observed by more than one person from the same place at the same time: difficulties in the corroboration of evidence and the establishment of facts and truth are hence more understandable. Further, I have become more aware of differences in different individuals' perceptions which seem to arise, in some cases anyway, at least partly as the result of differences in individuals' metaphysics. Also, my examination of some paradoxes has taught me how misunderstandings can arise as a result of inappropriate metaphysics.

I have come to appreciate the significance of different types of metaphysics, including speculative metaphysics, and hence I have acquired greater tolerance of beliefs in unprovable propositions, many of which, such as a belief in a god, I have realised I held myself.

## PART I. INTRODUCTION

Part I was written after all the other parts except Parts V and VI. In Chapter 1, 'This enquiry', an attempt is made to give a flavour of what the enquiry is about, and of what ideas in philosophy and systems thinking have influenced its progress.

Chapter 2. consists of a brief description of the school, the intention of which is to set a context for my work. I have pursued this enquiry whilst working in this school, and, as much of this thesis concerns change there, I make frequent references to the school in my writing.

The description of the school is followed by a list, with dates, of some significant issues, events and experiences, some of which occurred during the period of the enquiry and hence became partly subjects of it.

Chapter 4, 'Systems and the idea of systems as applied to looking at change' is an attempt to communicate how systems thinking is interpreted in the enquiry, how the ideas have been used, and how they seem related to some of the philosophical thinking which has developed in the enquiry.

Chapter 5, 'Analogical thought and systems', contains a series of quotations from Metamagical Themes: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Pattern, by Douglas Hofstadter, in an attempt to illustrate how the systems idea is used in the enquiry in an analogical or metaphorical way.

Chapter 6, 'Looking at change', suggests some difficulties which might confront an observer reporting on

change which has taken place over a period of years during which he or she has been changing.

CHAPTER 1

This enquiry

Change

Purpose

Organisation and functioning

Period studied

Interest in philosophy and systems thinking

Systems as a theme

Issues in historical contexts

Historical contexts as sets of systemic relations

Status quo as homeorhesis

Change

This is an enquiry in to a period of change in a school in which I work. It is also about change in my thought. It includes sections on significant developments in the school, some of my actions in relation to them, and some of the developments in my thinking which seem to result from my enquiry.

Purpose

A purpose which has emerged is one of developing useful tools for thought to assist my understanding of what is happening, and of what, effectively, I can do about it. Over the last five years, of general use in this respect has been a distinction between organisation and functioning. This was pointed out to me by my supervisor Mr W. M. Brookes.

Organisation and functioning

A distinction between organisation and functioning has enhanced my understanding of what happens.

To me organisation means a statement of what is intended should happen, and therefore it is more static in relation to the functioning.

The functioning is what actually happens, and is therefore more fluid.

Period studied

Most of what follows has been written during the last five years, but the events I report took place over a longer period. I have worked permanently at the

school since 1976, was first employed there in 1967, and I have some knowledge of its history since its foundation in 1948. Because the early years can be seen to have influenced more recent development, I include a section on some of the history of the school.

### Interest in philosophy and systems thinking

This enquiry began through my interest in philosophy. This developed, with the help of Mr. Brookes, from a rather decontextualised positivistic approach, with a dependence on fact and reason, into a more contextual method related particularly to R.G. Collingwood's metaphysics and idea of philosophy as history; this I applied to my experience as a teacher. Linked with this, again with the help of Mr. Brookes, I have used some ideas from systems theory as metaphors and analogies. The application of systems thinking to psychotherapy by Paul Watzlawick and Gregory Bateson has been particularly significant to me in this respect.

### Systems

By the word "system" I mean an interacting of bits of information, physical or psychological, or both, which results in a phenomenon which has some integrity and hence can be seen to have identity.

An open system, such as a human being or a colony of ants, receives inputs, such as air, food and information, from its environment.

A closed system, such as a clockwork clock, can not take from its environment to sustain itself. When it has been wound up it has potential energy, but once it has run down it has to be wound again; it can not absorb energy for itself from its environment.

An open system can be perceived as being integral with its environment and as such being a subsystem of larger systems.

### Systems as a theme

The enquiry began to develop a theme when the metaphor of "systems" seemed usefully applied to the school as a whole at one level, to smaller interacting groups of individuals at another, and to individuals singly at yet another. Similarly, the idea of systems containing levels within them has been useful when applied to systems of knowing and acting, and language which arises out of these.

Recurring but often implicit caveats in the enquiry are the notions: 1. that when concerns arise in the functioning of interactive human systems, the utility of systematic/analytical thinking is limited to levels at which analysis is applicable; and 2. that analysis can be a useful tool of thought if applied at some levels of functioning, provided that it can be combined with systemic/analogue thinking. For example, analysis can help me assess individual staff regarding their inclinations to change because I can often tease out suppositions using precise words; but I need systemic reasoning to help me see reasons why as a group their combined inclination to change is probably going to be lower than what might have been seen as the sum of their individual inclinations.

### Issues in historical contexts

An underlying assumption in my enquiry is that events, however small, can usefully be treated as issues within historical contexts which can in turn be considered in terms of systemic theory.

### Individuals and groups as open systems

Another assumption is that human beings and human organisations can usefully be regarded as open systems. As such they have a strong tendency to maintain a large degree of sameness in the relations within them. Consequently, the bringing about of systemic change is often much more difficult than it might at first sight seem. This is related to the assumption of the importance of considering issues within historical contexts.

### Historical contexts as sets of systemic relations

For me historical contexts can be considered as sets of systemic relations. Some events: those which affect relevant control factors within a context, can change the context significantly. When such changes occur, the new states can be durable because they in their turn have a strong systemic tendency to stay the same. I refer to these ideas in more detail, with examples, in later sections.

### Status quo as homeorhesis

Another assumption is that the conservation of the status quo within a system is better regarded as homeorhesis (stable flow) as opposed to homoeostasis (stable blockage of flow) because open systems with continuous inputs and outputs of information are usefully considered as existing in information flows. By information I mean all physical and psychological entities.

CHAPTER 2.

An outline of this enquiry's origin, history and progress.

An outline of this enquiry's context, origin, history and progress. p.9

The school.

Preparatory school and pre-prep.

Foundation.

The founding headmaster.

Academic standards and discipline.

The governors.

The assistant headmaster.

The senior master.

The teaching staff.

The geography of the school.

External examinations.

The curriculum.

Games.

Hobbies.

Daily programme

Main school forms.

The pre-prep.

The house system.

The tutorial system.

Issues Events and Experiences p. 23

## CHAPTER 2. AN OUTLINE OF THIS ENQUIRY'S ORIGIN, HISTORY AND PROGRESS

### The School

#### Preparatory School and Pre-prep

The school in which I have now, January 1992, worked permanently since September 1976, and in which I first worked as a student teacher in September 1967, is a co-educational preparatory school catering for children between the ages of 7 and 14. It has a pre-preparatory department, which was opened in 1985, which caters for children of ages 3 years to 6 years.

The preparatory school is the major context of this study, though reference is made to the pre-prep.

#### Foundation

The school was founded in 1948. In 1954 it was bought by a man who remained as headmaster until 1983. He is generally regarded as the founding headmaster. During his headmastership the school developed a special character and expanded from about a hundred boys to around 130 boys and 60 girls.

#### The Founding Headmaster

The founding headmaster initially set out to run a boy's preparatory school of a slightly progressive nature. He had attended and worked in more traditional prep. schools. These had tended to concentrate on academic work and games. They had also been inclined to be run by authoritarian headmasters who laid emphasis on strict formal discipline which was underpinned by not infrequent use of corporal punishment. Many of these schools had been rather stark unhomely

institutions.

The new headmaster of 1954 wanted his school to be more homely and to have a greater breadth of activity than the traditional schools. He laid great emphasis on the importance of extra curricular pursuits. He strongly encouraged music - all pupils had to learn the violin when they arrived -, craft - all pupils learnt woodwork -, and art. There was an hour long hobbies period every evening on working days, and, though traditional team games were to be played, activities with an outward bound flavour were strongly encouraged. Hence there were opportunities for riding - the school had its own instructor and stables-, and sailing - the headmaster was a proficient helmsman himself -, and at the end of the summer term the whole school would disperse on various expeditions on which pursuits such as camping, rock climbing and canoeing were added to the range.

It was the headmaster's particular aim that each child should be able to find some activity at which to do reasonably well and, more importantly, to enjoy.

#### Academic Standards, and discipline

The range and extent of the extracurricular activity has often led to questions being raised by some staff and parents as to whether or not the children have enough time to get down to their work properly. The founding headmaster's theory was that children should not be over pressurised academically up to the age of 14, but they should be well taught in a happy environment with a wide range of activity. This meant that cramming the weaker children to pass entrance exams to highly academic schools - which in the headmaster's views were unsuitable for such children - was not possible. It also meant that a child had to be

very clever to win a top academic scholarship for which, again, prolonged intensive study would be necessary. As rival school with less wide curricula were able to offer degrees of cramming for both types of child, the school gained something of a reputation for being non-academic. I discuss this more fully, along with how I think the concern might be resolved to some extent, in Chapter 17.

Partly, I suggest, as a result of the headmaster's friendly and relaxed manner with the children, and also his stated desire not to be a martinet headmaster, it was felt by some staff and parents that the level of discipline in the school was not as good as it should have been. This led to some conflict which I describe, along with some suggested resolutions, in Chapter 16.

In spite of reservations held by some, the school prospered and expanded as already described. In 1966 it became a charitable trust with a board of governors, the founding headmaster continuing in office until his retirement in 1983.

#### Governors

The board of governors elects its members. In his years as a student and young schoolmaster, the headmaster had been involved in charitable activities with groups associated with the evangelical wing of the Church of England. One of the initial governors, chosen by the headmaster, had been a prominent evangelical who had attracted more, some of whom he had managed to help become elected to the board; eventually an imbalance on the board in favour of evangelicals seemed to result. This was resented by some staff, including me, and eventually we objected. This I discuss more fully in Chapter 15.

There are twelve governors. Their primary function is to appoint the headmaster who is responsible to them for the day-to-day running of the school. The governors have an official meeting once a term to decide matters of general policy, development and expenditure. Two subcommittees: the finance and general purposes committee, and the development committee, report and make recommendations to the board.

The governors appoint the bursar who is responsible for the finances and the fabric of the school. None of the teaching staff has any direct responsibility for financial matters. Each head of department has to discuss any proposed expenditure with the bursar; there are no departmental budgets.

### **The Assistant Headmaster**

The headmaster is aided by the assistant headmaster who organises the day-to-day running of the school including the school calendar, the timetable, the forms, examinations and any other administration which is directly to do with the children, except - since 1986 - the discipline. Previously the discipline had been the responsibility of the assistant headmaster, but he had seemed to lack the strength to be adequately effective, so I suggested the creation of a new post of senior master. I discuss this in Chapter 16.

### **The Senior Master**

The senior master is responsible for the day-to-day discipline in the school. He confers with the headmaster over serious matters, and the headmaster is clearly ultimately responsible. The senior master organises the staff duty rota, and he presides over the patrol competition, the results of which depend upon

the children's acquisition of pluses for helpful behaviour, and minuses for bad behaviour. The senior master presides over the secular assembly each morning and uses this time to make general points about discipline.

### The Teaching Staff

Apart from the headmaster, assistant headmaster and senior master there are also sixteen full time teachers, a full-time riding instructor and a part-time woodwork teacher.

There is one specialist teacher for each of the following: English, French, history, geography (the senior master), Latin (the assistant headmaster), religious knowledge (the headmaster), art, design technology, information technology and physical education: in each case the specialist teaches her or his subject at senior level, and is also the head of her or his department. There are two full-time specialist maths, science and music teachers (there are several part-time music teachers) one of whom in each case is head of the department.

The transition forms, Form 1, and, to some extent, Form 2 are taught by their form teachers who tend to be specialist teachers for these junior ages. There is some liaison between the heads of departments and the junior school teachers, but in my view, as I suggest in Chapter 17, not nearly enough.

The transition forms and Forms 1 and 2 together are termed the junior school, and Forms 3, 4, 5 and 6 are termed the senior school.

### The Geography of the School

The central part of the school is housed in a large mansion dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The senior boarding boys, aged ten to fourteen, live in the mansion or main house, and are supervised by two bachelor housemasters with the help of three matrons. The boarding girls are accommodated in a conversion of estate workers quarters adjoining the main house, and they are looked after by the senior master's wife who lives with her husband in an adjoining flat. The junior boarding boys live in purpose built accommodation which is no more than thirty yards from the main house; they are supervised by the assistant headmaster and his wife, whose accommodation adjoins, with the help of a resident matron.

Adjoining, or in close proximity to, the main building are, from West to East: the water tower, the junior boys' accommodation, the swimming pool, the main building, the junior school, the science laboratories, the computer room, the gym, art and craft rooms, workshops, stables, kitchens and dining room and the pre-prep. There are teaching rooms in the main house and adjoining buildings. Also in the main house is a main hall, in which secular assemblies take place, a chapel, and an impressive library. The headmaster lives in a house thirty yards to the east of the main building.

The school stands in its own ninety acre estate which includes playing fields, tennis courts, two lakes - one used for teaching sailing - and woodland with extensive rides.

## External Examinations

The school prepares children for the Common Entrance Examination which in most cases is taken at the age of thirteen, though a few of the girls take eleven or twelve plus Girls' Common Entrance, and move on accordingly to schools which cater for girls only.

## The Curriculum

In accordance with the Common Entrance syllabus and the requirements of the National Curriculum - the two are moving closer together - the curriculum includes obligatory English, maths, French, history, geography, science, Latin, religious studies, art, craft design technology, information technology, drama, physical education, class music for the 8 ad 9 year olds, and class woodwork for the 8 year olds. Learning musical instruments, riding, and sailing in the summer are optional extras.

## Games

The boys play soccer in the autumn term, rugby and hockey in the spring, and cricket in the summer. The girls play netball and hockey in the two winter terms, and rounders in the summer. All children do some athletics and swimming during the summer.

## Hobbies

Hobbies in the winter terms include fencing, basketball, needlework, chess, snooker, model railways, modelling, rifle shooting, table tennis, judo, wood-work, craft, stable management and natural history. In the summer term these are extended to tennis, croquet, swimming, bee-keeping and cycle proficiency.

The children are expected to be occupied on all four hobbies evenings: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and they change their programmes termly, where appropriate, so everyone has a chance of doing each hobby. Where necessary separate sessions for senior and junior groups are held. Some of the more specialised hobbies are supervised by visiting part-time teachers.

Though hobbies time used to be an hour, it has now, owing to the demands on the timetable from an increased number of subjects in the curriculum, been reduced to forty five minutes.

Each teacher supervises their particular hobby or hobbies on three out of the four hobby evenings per week. Each teacher has a half day every week on either a Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday, starting at 11.15a.m.; Wednesdays are half days as regards lessons, and school matches take place in the afternoons, as also they do on Saturdays.

#### Daily programme

The boarders rise at 7a.m. and have breakfast at 7.45. The day children arrive between 8 and 8.20. The staff are briefed by the headmaster at 8.15, and the children assemble at 8.25 for notices in the main hall, followed by a short service in the chapel. Form Time, when the children tidy their desks and get ready for lessons under the supervision of their form teacher, is at 8.40.

Lessons, all of which last 35 minutes, begin at 8.50 with two, then there is a five minute break, then another two lessons and then there is Short Break from 11.15 until 11.35. In this break the children can play within an area of about 150 by 100 yards which includes

a lawn the size of a football pitch, 3 hard courts, and an extensive climbing frame with swings and slides. The staff meet informally over coffee and biscuits. Then there are two more lessons and then Long Break from 12.45 until 1.15p.m. During Long Break a period of supervised extra work in which poor work can be redone takes place; also individual music lessons and practices take place, as also does voluntary, informal, though supervised and taught, woodwork; otherwise the children are free to play inside - they may play snooker or table tennis unsupervised - or out, if fine.

At 1.15p.m. the children queue for lunch served from a central hatch and eaten at designated tables accompanied, in most cases, by members of staff. After lunch the ten year olds downwards read quietly while the older children may rest or be free as during Long Break, until 2p.m. when there are a further two lessons. Then, after a twenty minute break for changing, there is an hour's games followed by twenty minutes for tea and then half an hour's prep. is followed by forty five minutes of hobbies until supper, or going home time for the day children, at 6.10p.m.

After supper the eight year olds and under go to bed, those roughly ten or under watch a video, those roughly eleven and twelve do a prep; and the seniors in their final year, whether scholarship or Common Entrance candidates, do an assignment, which is a project in either science, geography or history, which has to be researched and written up over a period of a week. During the assignment/prep. period the ten year olds go to bed at 7.15p.m., eleven year olds at 7.35, twelve year olds at 7.55, and the seniors between 8.05 and 8.30p.m.

### Main school forms

The main school has five year groups or Forms each containing A and B forms in which children are placed on the basis of academic attainment. In theory both A and B forms in the same year cover the same syllabus, but the A form will ultimately cover more examples of particular topics, simply because it will work faster; this does not apply so much to more practical subjects such as science, where each lesson is very much more a self-contained unit.

Form 1 contains eight to nine year olds, Form 2 nine to ten year olds, Form 3 ten to eleven year olds, Form 4 eleven to twelve year olds, and Form 5 twelve to thirteen year olds in their leaving year. Form 6, the scholarship form, contains children, from the ages of eleven to thirteen, who are either candidates for Winchester Entrance or considered to be potential scholars.

The children in Forms 1 and 2 are taught most subjects by their form teachers, but the higher forms are taught by specialist teachers in subject rooms. Each form has a form teacher who is concerned with the general organisation - i.e. making sure the children have all they need for lessons, and that their desks are tidy. If the form teacher is a specialist, he or she may teach their form only one subject. Each form has one room, often the form teacher's subject room, as its base.

### The pre-prep.

The pre-prep. which began in 1985, has three forms catering for three to four year olds, four to five year olds, and five to six year olds respectively. There are transition forms in the main school which cater for

children between the pre-prep. and the main school.

The question of whether we should have a pre-prep., and, if so, where and how big it should be, became a source of conflict between the headmasters and staff. I refer to this in greater detail in Chapter 18.

In addition to the headmaster, assistant headmaster and senior master, there are sixteen full-time teachers in the main school, including the transition forms, and three in the pre-prep.

#### The house system

For the purposes of competition, not accommodation, the children in the main school are divided in to four houses each of which contains four patrols with ten to twelve children in each patrol. Each patrol has a patrol leader who is a senior child in a position of responsibility for helping the staff run the school. The patrol leaders are assisted by seconds, who deputise in the patrol leaders' absences, and who otherwise are given duties to carry out around the school. Patrol leaders are sometimes promoted to being prefects, thus allowing seconds to become patrol leaders. Becoming a prefect is an award for being a good patrol leader - no more responsibilities are incurred - and, in cases where seconds succeed, responsibility for the patrol is passed on to the successor.

The main task of the patrol leader is to organise her or his patrol, checking for any missing, at the secular assembly at 8.30a.m., and to encourage the members of the patrol to gain credits (house points for academic work), and pluses for helpful behaviour around the school. Equally, patrol leaders are expected to discourage members of their patrol from gaining minuses

for bad behaviour, and conduct marks - equivalent to six minuses - for very bad behaviour. Patrol leaders supervise their patrols at supper time when only one member of staff is present.

The pluses and minuses - they can not cancel out one another - are added roughly every three weeks, and members of the patrols with least minuses and most pluses receive small edible prizes. At the end of each term the grand totals are computed, and the houses with the best scores are awarded prizes; (likewise the house with the most credits receives an award). The senior master - a post created in 1986 at my suggestion and which I discuss in some detail in Chapter 16 - introduced and runs the competition for pluses and minuses which is now a significant component of the disciplinary system.

#### The tutorial system

Related to the house system is the tutorial system. Each house has three or four members of staff who are tutors to children in that house. Each child in Form 3 upwards has a tutor who is met in private, weekly, to discuss academic progress, behaviour if necessary, and any particular concern which might have arisen for the child: a difficulty with a particular subject or member of staff perhaps. Roughly every three weeks the children are given grades for their work; these range from A to E for effort and from 1 to 5 for attainment, a C3 being considered an average grade. Each tutor is regarded as being *in loco parentis* as regards her or his tutees' personal welfare, with direct responsibility to the headmaster.

### Academic assessment: exams and grades

Forms 3 and 4 sit school exams, set by the staff in November and June. Form 5 sits Common Entrance trial exams in November and March, and then the Common Entrance proper in June. The transition forms and Forms 1 and 2 sit school exams in June only.

As a result of performances in school exams, and the opinions of members of staff, there is some movement between the A and B streams within each year group.

Regular feedback regarding academic work is received by the headmaster via the regular assessment grades which are considered by the tutors; these grades are entered into a central book which the headmaster scrutinises. Usually two D, i.e. below average for effort, grades result in the child in question being put on a report card which has to be signed by each teacher after each lesson and shown to the headmaster once a day.

### The duties of the duty staff

Every day there are two members of staff on duty with direct responsibility to the headmaster for the general running of the school - e.g. getting the children to lessons and meals on time by chasing them up after breaks and periods of free time - and the behaviour of the children outside lessons. There are regular pairs of staff for Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays respectively. Duties on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays are done on a rota basis.

A duty day starts at 8.15a.m. when the house staff come off duty as regards having sole responsibility for the children in their care. The duties of the duty

staff are as follows:

1. to supervise the children going in and coming out of chapel;
2. to supervise the children at Short Break, patrolling the outside play areas, or the inside of the school if it is raining;
3. to patrol in and outside the school at Long Break;
4. to supervise the children going in to, during, and coming out of lunch;
5. to supervise the children: the juniors resting and the seniors free or resting, after lunch;
6. to supervise the children at supper if the headmaster, who usually does this, is unable to be there;
7. to supervise the younger children watching television and seniors doing preps and assignments after supper: the latter are probably the most arduous and difficult to supervise because the children are spread out around the school in their respective form rooms;
8. to see that the children go to bed at the correct times.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays there are an extra two hours of free time after 4p.m. to be patrolled, and on Saturdays there is free time again after supper, there being no preps or assignments. Sundays are different again in that the children are free virtually all day except for a letter writing period, a chapel service and meals.

In general a member of staff will do one regular weekday duty every fortnight - there are four members of staff available each for Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday respectively. Also there is roughly one Wednesday, one Saturday, and one Sunday duty to be done by each member of staff during a term.

### Staff meetings

Staff meetings take place once a week on Wednesday mornings. The headmaster chairs the meetings - they do not usually take place if he is unavailable. The agenda often includes items such as: briefings/debriefings regarding current events such as parents evenings; discussion of possible patrol leaders or seconds; form moves; new children; children with particular difficulties; arrangements for forthcoming events; developments in Common Entrance or the National Curriculum.

Though I have suggested, and it has been agreed, that we should always talk about the children first, this discipline has not been followed. The discussions often seem to become bogged down with trivia, partly because they are allowed to continue fairly informally, the result being that the conversation tends to be monopolised by one or two rather loquacious staff.

## Issues, Events and Experiences

A list of some significant issues, events and experiences, some of which led up to, and hence are part of the origin of the enquiry, others of which occurred during the period of the enquiry and hence became partly subjects of it.

1979 Correspondence with one of the evangelical governors.

1981 July: I instigated an extraordinary staff meeting about religion in the school.

1981 August: I decided to try to pursue a serious enquiry relating philosophy to education.

1981 September: extraordinary staff meeting on discipline for which I wrote a paper.

1981 December: my first meeting with Mr. W.M. Brookes.

1982 March: some of the staff at the school heard a rumour that the headmaster-to-be was ardently evangelical.

1982 March: I began correspondence with the chairman of the governors about the evangelical aspects of the school.

1982 June: a meeting took place between the chairman of the governors, two other members of staff and me to discuss the evangelical issue.

1983 I read R.G. Collingwood's Autobiography and C.H. Waddington's Tools for Thought, at the suggestion of Mr. Brookes.

1983 September: a new headmaster took office.

1983 October: I read R.G. Collingwood's Essay on

Metaphysics.

1984 February: the new headmaster initiated discussion about academic standards.

1984 October: controversy began over whether or not we should have a pre-prep. school and, if so, how it should be accommodated.

1984 October: I began attending W.M. Brookes's seminars.

1985 February: the governors announced that the pre-prep. building development was to be postponed.

1985 May: concern arose over finance; one total and two partial redundancies ensued.

1985 June: extraordinary meeting of governors, headmasters and staff to discuss school's finances.

1985 July: extraordinary end of term staff meeting to discuss many issues including academic standards, school discipline, and finance. I wrote papers after these, summarising what I thought had been said and my thoughts at the time.

1985 August: through reading F.E. Emery's Systems Thinking and Stafford Beer's Platform for Change, and through my concern about developments in the school, I became interested in trying to apply systems thinking to

the functioning of the school.

1985 September: the pre-prep opened within existing school accommodation.

1985 November: ISJC accreditation visit and subsequent report.

1986 March: I wrote a proposal for my research.

1986 March: extraordinary staff meeting on behaviour and discipline at the end of which I suggested we should have a senior master.

1986 May: I registered as a research degree candidate.

1986 August: I discovered P. Watzlawick's Change, and then his Pragmatics of Human Communication; I then read G. Bateson's Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Through reading these books and having already read Collingwood's metaphysics my interest in systems thinking and metaphysics applied to individual minds and groups of minds developed. At this time I wrote my sections on A.J. Ayer's logical positivism and R.G. Collingwood's metaphysics, metaphysics, paradox - including Watzlawick on paradox and Russell's theory of logical types - and that on time.

1986 September: my nominee became senior master; the headmaster had a heart attack; a new timetable was instituted with eight instead of seven

lessons per day.

1987 March: controversy arose over proposals for the re-siting and expense there-of of the pre-prep; I wrote a paper about the pre-prep issue for an extraordinary staff meeting on the subject, and I also wrote a letter, which was returned to me as being out of order, about the issue to the chairman of the governors; this issue seemed to be a watershed in relation to my actions with regard to school policies.

1987 December: I argued in opposition to the headmaster and assistant headmaster in a development committee meeting against spending money on a sports hall, and in favour of trying to improve academic standards. I reacted spontaneously in the meeting, in spite of the "watershed" in March, but since then I have not directly opposed the headmaster, in public or in private.

1988 January: as a result of the conflict in the development committee meeting of December 1987, I wrote a paper on academic standards in relation to development for a meeting of the committee in January; in the paper, I made a point of commending and expressing confidence in the headmaster and assistant headmaster.

1988 June: Mr. Brookes drew my attention to an article by David Bakhurst and Jonathan Dancy entitled "The dualist strait-jacket" in the Times Higher Education Supplement; in response to this I wrote a paper which I called "An attempt to apply some personal (philosophical) theory to a contemporary problem."

1988 July: I became interested in the idea of issue history in relation to analogical thinking, through reading "Thinking in Time" by Richard Neudstat and Ernest May, and part of "Metamagical Themas" by Richard Hofstadter.

1990 November: I wrote "How I think some of my thinking and acting has changed since starting this enquiry."

1991 March: i) the headmaster raised discipline and behaviour as a topic, for the first time since March 1986, to be discussed at the end of term staff meeting;  
ii) as a result of the headmaster's concern, I arranged, with his agreement, a series of four voluntary staff meetings, during the Spring holidays, to discuss discipline and behaviour; this work was carried on during the following summer term and subsequent summer holiday.

## CHAPTER 3.

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Early Stages

Interest in philosophy

This enquiry originates from the early stages of an interest in philosophy which has developed over the past ten years. Thus it may demonstrate as much about change in me as it does about change in other systems.

Philosophy of education

My acquaintance with philosophy as an area of enquiry, which, because of the nature and diversity of philosophy, seems a better description than 'subject' or 'discipline', arose through a course in the Philosophy of Education which I attended during my teacher training. During the course it became clear that, as had the other students, I had been concerned with philosophical issues quite seriously previously, but, having no formal introduction to philosophy, I had not categorised this activity conventionally. All of us students seemed to take some time to get in to the ways of thinking required by the course, but, once in, it seemed that philosophy was an activity which should have a greater place in education as a whole.

Through positivism towards speculative metaphysics

That first course now seems very limited, but it helped to give me a lasting interest. My own thought was then much narrower, and, having had an almost entirely scientific education since the age of sixteen, it is thus not perhaps surprising that I was particularly attracted by analytical, positivistic philosophy. This seems to be a not unusual course of development which is not entirely to be scorned, be-

cause such a beginning can provide a disciplined basis with the potential to be fruitfully modified through a more mature regard for more speculative philosophical thinking. Fortunately I was helped towards this latter stage by Mr. Brookes who showed how a philosophical perspective can be profitably blended with systems thinking and other scientific and artistic methods. Some of these proved a useful collection of tools for thought which for me now gives much greater significance and vibrance to subjects such as Economics, Sociology, Psychology and Biology.

### Logic and analysis

Through my training and casual reading after it, I became particularly influenced by the analytical approaches of Plato, R.S Peters, B Russell and A. J. Ayer, and I began my work as a teacher with a belief that logic and the analysis of concepts were useful aids to thinking more clearly and hence functioning more effectively.

### Systematic and systemic thinking

As a result of the influence of Ayer in particular, I had little interest in metaphysics - though I had not much idea what it was - and I became sceptical of religion. I still believe analysis to be important at appropriate levels of thought, but I have become aware, through my research, that in order to tackle a problem within the context of a system, analysis must be allied with systemic thinking combined with an awareness of interacting metaphysical subsystems within the overall context. This could be described as a combination of systematic and systemic thinking.

## Systemic thinking

My systemic thinking is not rigorously technical. It is rather a case of my drawing on some of the systemic phenomena of which I have been made aware by the writings of Beer, Bateson, Emery and Watzlawick. These phenomena I have found useful for the purposes of identifying and applying metaphors and analogies. My introduction to systems theory and metaphysics I owe, amongst much more, to the teaching of Mr. Brookes.

## The Point of the Enquiry 1991

### No ultimate point

In one sense the enquiry is unlikely to finish in my lifetime - assuming my acquired sensitisation lasts me out - because I shall probably continue to try to find my way around in the sense of exploring my experience. Consequently, I am now in a position to feel the enquiry does not have to have an ultimate point, though, as I say elsewhere, purposes have arisen.

### Tools for thought

My intention now is to sort out some tools for thought which I have found useful in attempting to resolve some of the difficulties I have encountered not only in trying to identify and understand what has been happening, but also in taking action to try to change, or at any rate cope with, part of it.

### My change in outlook

If I were asked for the point of this enquiry now, 1991, my answer would be different from what it would have been ten years ago when I first began thinking about what I could do. I was then in need of more

recognition for my ideas, and I felt there was a powerful tool, in the form of philosophy, with which I could derive and demonstrate effective solutions to problems. Many of the problems I saw were the result, I felt, of a mixture of some of the following: ignorance, lack of thought, dishonesty, greed and prejudice. I thought people's behaviour in relation to the functioning of the school could usefully be changed by showing them, with facts and reasons, to be wrong. I thought, mistakenly, I realise now, that I was well equipped to attend to these states of affairs, and that there would be utility in showing how this might be done.

### Change in my thinking

The evolution of my thinking may I hope be regarded as a development from a youthful desire to change the world, towards a more considered and apt view of how some things work and how they can be attended to more effectively.

### Slow early development

My philosophical development seems to have progressed very slowly, if at all, between the end of my training in 1976 and Mr Brookes's recommending I read R. G. Collingwood's autobiography in 1982. My stagnation I can now see was the result of a circularity in the way I selected books and how I read them. I tended to read familiar and like-thinking authors like R. S. Peters, A. J. Ayer and B. Russell. My development seemed to hasten significantly as a result of moving from Collingwood's autobiography to his *Essay on Metaphysics*.

### Metaphysics

Through his *Essay on Metaphysics* I became aware of

R. G. Collingwood's theory of presuppositions, and his view that philosophy should largely, if not entirely, be considered as being part of history. This influenced me to favour a combination of analysis with a more contextual view of knowledge. I became interested in metaphysics and the conflict between positivism and metaphysics: in particular, that between A. J. Ayer and R. G Collingwood.

### Conflict between A.J. Ayer and R.G Collingwood

A. J. Ayer's first book, Language Truth and Logic, begins with a chapter entitled The Elimination of Metaphysics, and the thrust of the book is towards cutting away "metaphysical nonsense" and rendering knowledge which is neither empirically verifiable nor tautology as meaningless. Collingwood defended metaphysics against Ayer in his lectures and in his Essay. As I have been influenced by both these thinkers, I have discussed the particular argument at some length in a separate section.

### Ayer and Collingwood instructive at different levels of thinking

I consider the work of Ayer and Collingwood to be instructive at different levels of thought, and I suggest that it was partly because of this difference of levels - which arose from a difference in their individual metaphysical systems - that they disagreed. I was influenced by Ayer's emphasis on analysis and Collingwood's emphasis on the importance of presuppositions in historical contexts.

### Different uses of the word metaphysics

My reading Collingwood and Ayer alerted me to some different uses of the word metaphysics, and so I in-

clude a section on metaphysics in an attempt to clarify some meanings.

### Individuals as open systems

My interest in the notion of individuals as open systems interacting with each other in larger open systems, such as informal social groups and formal organisations, led me to some of the work of Beer, Bateson and Watzlawick, all of whom apply systemic theory to human systems.

### Paradox and logical types

Beer and Watzlawick both make use of the idea of paradox in demonstrating difficulties in understanding systemic problems, and in indicating that in order to resolve systemic problems, as in resolving paradoxes, a metasystem or metastate needs to be achieved. This led me to an interest in paradox and hence to Russell's theory of logical types. Here systems theory led back to more traditional philosophy, and, as a result of my interest in paradox and my belief that trying to resolve paradoxes can lead to a better understanding of some phenomena, I include a section on this subject.

### Cartesian dualism and mind as an open system

The combination of metaphysics and systems theory enabled me to refine my idea of mind as an open system. This idea illuminated what I consider to be fairly commonly held but obstructive suppositions about mind. It also prompted me to write, in order to set out my own thinking, a private response to an article about Cartesian dualism which appeared in the Times Higher Education Supplement and which was brought to my attention by Mr. Brookes. This I include in a separate section.

## My Action and Change in the School

As regards my action in relation to change in the school, I have reported on major issues in separate sections. These include a section on a religious aspect of the school, one on discipline, another on academic standards, another on a controversy over a new prepreparatory department, and also a section on general change: this touches on all the others.

### The evangelical issue

The first of these is about action taken, largely by me, in connection with the school's relationship with the evangelical movement of the Church of England. Concern arose when several members of staff, including me, began to feel that there was a disturbing trend towards an increase in the proportion of evangelical governors which, we thought, was not only contrary to the wishes of the founding headmaster but also would lead to an undesirable, as far as we were concerned, change in the character of the school. The appointment of a new headmaster brought this matter further to the fore because, more than a year before he took up his appointment, we were informed that he was ardently evangelical. In reporting my action I have tried to maintain an awareness of some of the history behind the issue, some of the different metaphysical systems involved, and some systemic phenomena which seem relevant. I suggest the story provides an example of the deficiency, in attending to a human issue, of analytical thinking in the absence of systemic and analogical thinking.

### Discipline

I have reported on action taken in relation to problems concerning discipline in the school. Up to

March 1986 there had been regular discussions of this subject in staff meetings. Several extraordinary staff meetings had been called specifically to discuss discipline. Eventually it seemed that similar ground was being covered again and again at successive meetings. The two headmasters seemed to be having difficulty in improving the functioning. I felt we needed to give another member of staff specific responsibility for discipline. There appeared to be someone eligible. I had reservations about his possible effect on the system, and its effect on him, but, on balance I thought he ought to do the job, so I suggested the idea to the headmaster. I report on the concern with regard for the historical context. My contention is that the attempt at a resolution of this issue included an effective combination of analytical, analogical, and systemic thinking.

### Academic standards

Similar thinking I have applied in a report on a recurrent concern about the conflicts which arise in our attempts to maintain a high variety of extra-(academic) curricular activity. This we do in order to preserve our identity, but inevitably it makes it harder for us to achieve high academic standards. This is an issue for which I have developed theory but over which I have taken no action apart from writing a paper for the development committee. However, I have felt it instructive to try to identify some of the concerns, to consider some of the relevant history, and to propose some resolutions. There seems to be a systemic problem here, which might be profitably attended to, fairly simply; however, in my perception, some of the concerns originate more from things as they appear to parents and staff, rather than from things as they are.

## **Standards and the pre-prep.**

I believe standards generally in the school are related to the quality of the pupils and the expectations of the staff.

In the last five years there has been a trend towards an increasing proportion of day children in the school. Arguably this affects the overall quality of children, because the catchment area is reduced and we are located in an area where there are three other private schools nearby.

The proportion of local children has increased because -in my view- we have opened a preprep. department which automatically provides about half our annual intake. However, the headmaster would argue that there is nevertheless a strong national trend in favour of day education. I accept this as being so, but argue that there is still a boarding market for which to compete.

## **Conflict over the institution of the pre-prep.**

The pre-prep. was instituted by the new headmaster. It is run by his wife.

The whole question of whether we should have a pre-prep., and, if so, where it should be located and how big it should be, was a source of conflict and controversy between staff and headmaster over a period of nearly four years. During this time the setting up of temporary accommodation, and then the planning and building of a special new department took place. I include a short separate section on this issue because of the significance of the arguments advanced, local politics involved, and the resulting systemic changes to the school.

### Problems as concerns: issues in historical contexts

I see this thesis as an account of some of the development of my theory and action in a search for better ways of thinking not only about what I do, and what happens to me, but also about what others do and what happens to them. A central belief is that problems in human interactions, which Neustadt and May in their book Thinking in Time say are better referred to as "concerns," are usefully considered as issues in historical contexts in a flux of time. Issues arise out of conflict, and conflict is an almost inevitable consequence of interaction between two or more individuals.

### Individuals' metaphysical systems

I suggest that each individual has what can be regarded as his or her own metaphysical system which, in my view, can be regarded as a systemic phenomenon with a high degree of self conservation. This is because a metaphysical system can be regarded as not only various levels of bits of information (bits of knowledge) in a system of knowing, but also the relationships between the bits of information in that system.

### Levels within an individual's metaphysical system

Metaphysical, used in this sense, is a relative term.

Each bit of metaphysical knowledge is at a different metaphysical level, for the sake of argument at a higher one, from the bits of knowledge it is about. The bits of knowledge at the lower level can be metaphysical in relation to other bits of knowledge at an even lower level. In my section on metaphysics I

have tried to show, through examples, what I mean by this.

### Russell's theory of types, and Collingwood's theory of presuppositions

This idea of metaphysical levels can be related, in my view, to Russell's theory of logical types and Collingwood's theory of relative and absolute presuppositions. These two theories have helped my thinking develop, and so I refer to them in more detail in separate sections.

### Metaphysics, paradox, and understanding

Another assumption in my thinking is that the confusion in and between metaphysical and or logical levels is an important factor leading, in some cases, to a lack of understanding, and in others to misunderstanding or even paradox. I give examples of these in my sections on metaphysics and paradox.

### Summary

#### **Philosophy and Systems Theory at Appropriate Levels**

To sum up, the point of the enquiry has developed in to one of finding improved methods -not a single method- of knowing what is going on, and of finding better ways of dealing with it. In doing this I draw on my interest and belief in the utility, at appropriate levels, of some philosophy and systems theory. I attempt to knit these two areas of thinking together at appropriate points of intersection.

#### **Philosophy, Systems Theory, Issue History and Analogy**

I have been influenced by, amongst other things,

the analysis and anti-metaphysics of A.J. Ayer, the metaphysics and the alliance of philosophy and history of R. G. Collingwood, and the systems theory of Beer, Emery, Watzlawick and Bateson. I connect all this with the idea of issue history developed by Neustadt and May, and the ideas of the same authors on the validity of the use of good analogies in decision making.

### **Analytical and Analogical Thinking**

More simply, perhaps, I believe in the importance of an awareness of a distinction between analytical and analogical thinking, and the importance of taking care to apply these at appropriate levels.

### **Systems and Analogical Thinking**

I refer frequently to systems and analogical or metaphorical thinking, and so I include the following section to give an idea of what I understand and mean by these.

Systems and complexity.  
Is any system not complex?  
The word system in scientific and ordinary language.  
Links between literary and scientific concepts.  
Attitude change.  
Power.  
Mind.  
Power and other minds.

System the word. p.47  
Art and Science.  
Interacting of bits of information.  
Open systems and vortices.  
Discrete information and change.  
Systematic and systemic justification.

What I think I am, and have been, trying to do p.49  
Systems and analogical thought.  
Change in me, and I in change.  
Philosophy and systems theory.  
Paradox and knots in understanding.  
Changing theories.  
A difficulty.  
Other difficulties.  
Constrained by language.  
Non verbal intellectual faculties.  
The level and nature of a problem.

## CHAPTER 4 SYSTEMS AND THE IDEA OF SYSTEMS AS APPLIED TO CHANGE

### Systems and complexity

I believe there are advantages in trying to look at what is happening in terms of systems at various levels. I was tempted here to write "various levels of complexity" but then realised that if one focuses at almost any level, then often there can be perceived a complexity equal to that perceivable at any other level.

### Is any system not complex?

On a more anecdotal note, I remember being asked in a seminar, having just referred to the idea of complex systems, if I could think of any system which was not complex. My tentative answer was that as far as human systems were concerned I could not, but, after further thought I realised there was a relativity of complexity which was dependent on the level of the perception at which that complexity was perceived. For example a person can be regarded as an open complex system, with many and various inputs in the form of energy and information; in my view energy can be regarded as information.

In my view all physical and psychological entities can be regarded as information in the sense that they all have the potential to affect or inform systems which have the capacity to be affected. I regard anything which can be perceived, or sensed as being present, as a form of information because all such things seem to have the potential to affect systems which are suitably sensitive. Hence, energy can be regarded as information because it can be present in varying degrees. If a kettle is hot it is different

from one which is cold; hence its heat tells me something.

In a different sense, much information is conveyed as various forms of energy such as sound, light and electricity; the initial information actually becomes one of these forms of energy to be conveyed.

In another sense, some food contains potential energy which, having been eaten and digested, can inform the state of the system which is the body in that it can assist in raising the general level of activity in, and of, that system; other food can inform the body by becoming part of it.

If all aspects of an individual person were studied in great depth, the degree of complexity would be many times too great for even a life time's study for one man. If a social organisation were studied, a relative system of systems, which would be a social system consisting of individual complex systems would be found. The complexity of considering all of the bigger system is clearly ridiculously unwieldy, and so it seems that the bigger system would be much better studied at a different level.

To pursue this just a little further, even a relatively simple mechanical open system, like a water wheel turning in a river, can be seen as complex at some levels of perception, particularly in terms of the mathematics of the system.

#### The word 'system' in scientific and ordinary language

The word 'system' is disliked by some people with whom I have discussed my work. For them it seems its connotations are too much those of science and technology: mechanics in particular. This I think I understand. Consequently I feel that those of us who

have some mathematics and science in our backgrounds can, perhaps, fulfil a useful function for those who have less, by trying to illuminate concepts which can have existence in both a mathematical and an ordinary language sense. In other words: those people with an awareness of both clear and fuzzy mathematical ideas -the word labels for which occur in either a literal and/or metaphorical sense in ordinary language, poetry, or literature- can increase their exchange of meaning with those people with less mathematics, by attempting to set out some of the links between the two sorts of concepts.

### **Links between literary and scientific concepts**

These links could facilitate profitable exchanges of concepts between systems of knowing. Those who have an aversion to my use of "system" might feel differently if they moved to different suppositional states. However such moves might be difficult, perhaps impossible, to facilitate intentionally, rather as are changes in attitudes.

### **Attitude change**

I have referred in Chapters 10. and 16. to the difficulties of the changing (transitive) of attitudes, and the fact that attitudes apparently change (intransitive) spontaneously, though in some cases their changes can be seen to be responses to complex sets of circumstances. I suggest that questions about attitudes and suppositional states, and hence behaviour generally, are worthy of further enquiry. They seem particularly important in my struggle for power as an individual.

## **Power**

I do not mean to suggest I am struggling to attain a position where I can hold greater sway over others; I am trying to find ways in which I can be more effective in what I attempt to do: in other words how I can control and perhaps determine my local space better.

## **Mind**

To put these ideas in context I refer to my present theory, albeit speculative, of mind.

Mind I conceive of as an holistic entity which can be usefully thought about in terms of a highly complex information system, itself formed of bits of information which, in ordinary language, could be described as being of two types: either physical or psychological or both? As an enduring information system which exists in an information flux, mind has a complex structure, including feedback routes, which makes for the conservation of its identity. The experiences of individuals, which add up to what we sometimes refer to as their backgrounds, contribute to the formation of some of the structure. Suppositional states and attitudes are part of the structures of systems of knowing within individuals, and, at a higher level, between individuals. Because they constitute complex structures at different levels, they combine to form holistic, or, in other words, systemic phenomena which demonstrate systemic characteristics, one of which is persistence in the maintenance of the identity of the system as a whole. I refer to this at greater length in my section on Cartesian dualism.

## **Power and other minds**

In my personal quest for greater power over my

context, I have to be aware of my possible (perhaps a better word would be 'probable') need to change my suppositional states to make a better mapping on to the actuality. At the same time I have to enquire in to the "how" and "whether I ought to try" to change the suppositional states of other minds.

My dealing with other minds has inevitably to be done in a way which is to a great extent speculative. Hence I have felt a need to justify for my own reassurance, a recognition of a speculative side to philosophy and hence a type of metaphysics. In saying this I am aware of some of the pitfalls of applying my mind to my thought. One difficulty is analogous to that of metaphysicians who sought knowledge of that which is outside experience, by reasoning with concepts derived from their experience. They were criticised for applying concepts to things to which they were necessarily inapplicable, and hence they were said to be misusing them.

I discuss metaphysics more fully in Chapter 8. Metaphysics.

### **System the word**

#### **Art and science**

For me the word 'system' has much fluidity and flexibility. It has as much to do with art as it has with science, though, because of my theory of knowing (which I hope will become clear later) for me there is no clear division between these two.

#### **Interacting of bits of information**

A system to me is an interacting of bits of information, physical and psychological, in the flux of

space-time. Systems have 'lives' of various lengths: they can usefully be seen to have 'life'. An inspired creative moment for an artist might last a few seconds, while the artist's mind would clearly last a lot longer. (This latter is an example of a smaller system within a bigger system). An ant's life can perhaps usefully be measured in months, whilst its colony will last for several years. The solar system will last for a period beyond my conception: here is an example of a system which has within it systems within systems.

### **Open systems and vortices**

For me the idea of an open system evokes an idea of something analogous to a vortex. It is something which arises in a flux. It is therefore part of that flux but it can be seen to have identity within that flux. Its existence is sustained by its having inputs from, and outputs in to, the rest of the information flux.

### **Discrete information and change**

I justify my theory of discrete "bits" of information on the ground that I perceive differences between "things", and hence -if only conceptually- I can isolate one "bit" from another. However, my notion of system arises conceptually through more discerning observation.

I am also aware of change, and hence difference.

### Systematic and Systemic Justification

It could be argued in analytical terms that there is weakness in my applying analogical tools of thought to phenomena such as change because it is hard to justify this systematically. I counter that by saying

that these tools seem to help - it is hard to find anything else which does- and this seems to me to be adequate systemic justification.

### WHAT I THINK I AM, AND HAVE BEEN, TRYING TO DO

#### Systems and analogical thought

Having written about my notion of system and its place in my analogical thought, I now feel freer to say a little more about what I think I am, and have been, trying to do.

#### Change in me, and I in change

I have been trying to look at change, but I have also been trying to influence and take part in that change. Whilst looking at, and participating in, part of the flux which is my changing space, I have also been reading some philosophy and systems theory. My philosophical position and that area of philosophy which interests me has been influenced by the systems theory. I am aware of an intersection of the two.

#### Philosophy and systems theory

The type of theory I find useful will, I hope, become evident further on. As I said earlier, it has been influenced by a combination of the metaphysics/historical method of R. G. Collingwood and the systems theory of Emery, Bateson, Beer and Watzlawick, throughout much of which there seems more than a vague connection with the philosophy of paradox and Bertrand Russell's theory of logical types.

#### Paradox and knots in understanding

I have found that ideas which have been stimulated

by various paradoxes have illuminated hitherto unnoticed knots in my understanding. In some cases I have found a study of paradox of assistance in untying some of them and perhaps loosening others. The "knot loosening" metaphor and that of "finding ones way about", both of which may be attributed to Wittgenstein I believe, provide a useful simplification of what I am trying to do: that is to find my way about better through the flux of space - time which is my living environment.

### Changing theories

One of the results of my reading theories while trying to observe real change has inevitably been that my working theories have been modified and added to, in the process. The practice has therefore been partly a studying which has amounted to an observing while using theories, and partly a studying to form theories. Studying change in context inevitably means dealing with complexity which requires more than one theory at a time. I feel that notions of levels within systems, and of systems within systems - including those systems of language and individual and communal thought- have assisted here.

### A difficulty

A difficulty with this operational research - that is researching in practice - is that everything which happens is for real and irreversible; furthermore, there is often no way of telling why something has happened or why something else has not happened. Much of the enterprise is hence necessarily speculative. What I try to do is to assemble enough useful theory in or near the forefront of my mind in order to function as a better speculator at any particular time.

## Other Difficulties

### **Constrained by Language**

In attempting to resolve problems, systems have to be analysed to varying extents according to their type. Difficulties of idiosyncrasy of perception can arise here, but these difficulties and their potential resolutions probably remain fairly consistent with any particular observer. I suggest that because my mind deals with phenomena to a great extent within the medium I am now using - that is language - in a largely reductive way, then I have to reduce systems and systemic phenomena to labels which I can use within my discourse. This can be complicated further by an awareness of the importance of levels of discourse (levels within language) to which I shall refer in more detail later.

### **Non verbal Intellectual Faculties**

I believe I have other equally valid intellectual faculties which assist in my coping, and which are not easily -if at all- transferable in to words. These, like systems, are difficult to describe, but they can be hinted at. For example, I suggest I reason in order to help myself towards a state of partial contentment with how I feel - not the reverse.

### **The Level and Nature of a Problem**

Another difficulty which arose from extending my resources, systematic and systemic, is that of deciding the level and nature of a problem. I try to teach mathematics to children from nine years old to fourteen, and I find my difficulty analogous to some of those the children seem to encounter in deciding what methods to use to answer particular questions. At a

low level the question: "Is this a division problem or is it multiplication?" is quite a common example. The child's difficulty and his or her range of options from which to choose a method of solution may be much more simple than in my case, but I shall try to show that if a few apparently simple -in words at any rate- principles are kept in mind, then at least access to an attempt to attending to complex problems may be achieved.

CHAPTER 5

Analogical thought and systems

Some thoughts from Douglas Hofstadter

Some thoughts from Douglas Hofstadter

I use the word system a great deal in what is to me an analogical or metaphorical way. I also refer a lot to analogical or metaphorical thinking. In *Metamagical Themes: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Pattern*, by Douglas Hofstadter, chapter 24 is titled: Analogies and Roles in Human and Machine Thinking. Below I include some quotations from this chapter in order to give a flavour of my understanding of analogical thinking which seems to me to be a useful tool for thought in dealing with some of the concerns I have been trying to resolve.

"Most analogies arise as a result of unconscious filterings and arranging of perceptions, rather than as consciously sought solutions to cooked-up puzzles. To be reminded of something is to have unconsciously formulated an analogy".

p.550

(Presumably this refers to being reminded by a set of circumstances rather than by a person recalling something.)

"Our language provides for mappings of many degrees of accuracy"

p.556

"Their (categories') validity can at best be partial. No matter at what level of detail you cut off your scrutiny, your perception amounts to filtering out some aspects and funnelling the remainder in to a single con-

ceptual target, a mental symbol often labelled with just one word (such as 'word'). Each such mental symbol implicitly stands for the elusive sameness shared by all the things it denotes".

p.556

"The reason for worrying about human analogical thought is that it is there."

p.557

"Analogy is at, or close to, the pinnacle of our mental abilities."

p.575

"The term 'precedent' is just a legalistic way of saying 'well-founded analogue'."

p.576

"In our private lives most of our important judgements are made by conscious or unconscious analogy."

p.576

"The boundary line between making creative analogies and recognising pre-existent categories is very blurry."

p.576

"A change in scale (is) one of the most obvious analogical transforms."

p.576-7

"Our current mechanisms for analogy-making must certainly have emerged as a consequence of natural selection."

p.577

## CHAPTER 6

## Looking at change

A changing observer.

A participating observer.

Easy to say I have been wrong.

A need not to over complicate.

Logical levels.

Trying to look at change

A difficulty of looking at change, particularly that which has occurred over a period of ten to twenty years which is a relatively long time as far as a human life is concerned, is that the mind perceiving that change has inevitably been changing as well. Hence there is a relativistic difficulty in understanding and perception arising out of the relativity of the perceiver and the perceived.

A participating observer

A further difficulty arises if the perceiver is a participant in the change. A perceiver necessarily imposes something of her/himself in the act of perception (i.e. she/he is not merely a passive receiver). Further, when she/he is an active participant in a system under scrutiny by her or him there are necessarily further effects to be considered. Intended passive human observation present at action is inevitably interactive with the action. These phenomena are to a large extent unavoidable.

Easy to say I have been wrong

As my views have changed considerably, I find it quite easy to say that I have been wrong in many cases in regard to earlier issues. However, I have to remember that every temporal context is unique and complex.

When acting to resolve a problem, the problem is perceived as being of handleable size, but, in reality, the would-be problem resolver, in my cases I, may not be able to cope with the problem as it actually is.

### A need not to over complicate

To examine in detail some of the difficulties raised above would seem, perhaps, to over complicate what is desired to become, ultimately, a set of useful theories which might assist an understanding of what is happening at a common sense level. However, an awareness of some of the difficulties and deceptions of looking at phenomena is essential if the observer is genuinely concerned with improving his understanding of what is happening in and around him or her at a given time. The very act of observing the simplest of objects can be considered a change in itself. When the object is observed a second time, this is necessarily a different event and the second perception is necessarily affected by the previous perception and observation, even if only at the "I've seen this before" level.

### Logical levels

The idea of logical levels or orders of change, each of which derives its ordinal position from a contextual starting point which can be indicated by the observer, leads to a central theme in my thinking. This derives from a belief in the utility, in observing change, of an awareness of orders or levels in perception, thought and behaviour. This idea has been useful as applied to the following in particular:

- i) perception;
- ii) logical types;
- iii) systems;
- iv) language;
- v) suppositions;
- vi) discourse;
- vii) learning.

I discuss these ideas more fully in my chapters on: metaphysics; paradox; logical positivism and metaphysics; and, some personal theory applied to a contemporary concern about Cartesian dualism.

## PART II.

## DEVELOPMENT IN MY THINKING

Part II was written between 1985 and 1991, but particularly significant development occurred in 1986 when chapters on metaphysics, logical positivism and metaphysics, paradox, and part of the chapter on time were written.

Chapter 7, Philosophy and my work (1985), was written at a time when I was beginning to feel myself in a transition from a dependence on a limited and mainly analytical, positivistic approach, towards one which took account of metaphysics and a systems approach to human interacting.

Chapter 8, Metaphysics (1986), looks at some meanings of the word metaphysics and then offers an interpretation of R.G. Collingwood's metaphysics of suppositions. From these a crude distinction between "Old" and "New" metaphysics is made, and these are applied to practical examples.

Chapter 9, Conflict between the logical positivism of A.J. Ayer and the metaphysics of R.G. Collingwood (1986), discusses Collingwood's response, in his An Essay on Metaphysics, to A.J. Ayer's attempt to eliminate metaphysics in his Language Truth and Logic, and tries to show the significance of this argument to the development of my thinking.

Chapter 10, Paradox (1986 and 1991) indicates some of the effects which paradoxes seem to have had in assisting development in my thinking.

Chapter 11, Time (1986 and 1991) describes how my interest in, and understanding of, time have been enhanced by Zeno's paradoxes of space and time; it also indicates why I regard it as important to consider dif-

ferences in personal clocks when prescribing organisation for human functioning.

Chapter 12, Personal theory and a concern with Cartesian dualism, is my response to an article which appeared in the Times Higher Education Supplement about the influence of Cartesian dualism on contemporary philosophy. I include this as an example of an application of my acquired theory to a contemporary concern about philosophy.

CHAPTER 7.

Philosophy and my work

Solving problems.

Ethics and epistemology.

Metaphysics and language, actuality and perception.

Analysis and holism.

Philosophy and a human information science.

A position from which I can work.

Protest and establishing discourse.

The evangelical issue.

Solving problems

When I first became interested in philosophy in the middle seventies, I wanted to use it to solve problems. Naively I thought that if people were initiated into a philosophical way of thinking, then they would be able to solve their own problems - or many more of them - for themselves.

Ethics and epistemology

My philosophy was limited to a simple positivistic/analytic outlook, and for a long time as regards my work - particularly as I did not perceive disturbance in my teaching - I found little with which to get to grips philosophically. I thought work in the philosophy of education was concerned largely with ethics and epistemology; here I was putting the compartments before the problems, and I found I could cope without addressing myself to these rather dry and theoretical areas. Consequently I became frustrated in my search for an opening.

Metaphysics and language; actuality and perception

However, after meeting Mr. Brookes in 1981 I became aware of the importance of giving attention to metaphysics and language; reading R.G Collingwood's Essay in Metaphysics and part of L. Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations seemed to help. I began to recognise some of the potential for deception of thought by words. I became aware of the importance of making a distinction between the actuality of a problem and perceptions of it, and I began to attach more significance to the forces constraining the actions of individuals.

### Analysis and holism

I feel I can now relate philosophy to all my practice, in many and various ways. I feel more aware of the problems of perception and existence, and the importance of considering presuppositions. I feel I can still resort to a more analytical approach at appropriate levels in a context. Recognition of the usefulness of an existential approach - i.e. one concerned with individuals, including myself, as free agents constrained to various extents by external, often psychological/social forces - to situations has provided me with more awareness of some of the forces which affect action. This has illuminated the importance of an holistic appraisal and approach to problems and situations, while not precluding the use of analytical thinking at the level of detail.

### Analysis and complexity

My dependence on analysis has been reduced; I have acquired an awareness that much of the complexity of reality is too complex for analysis to be of use.

### Philosophy and a human information science

Earlier in the development of my interest in philosophy I thought I could use my limited analytical skills alone to solve social problems within the school. I now feel I was blinkered by my conception of philosophy.

Philosophy can not exist without people, and people exist in many and various forms. Hence, if I wish to apply what I feel I gain from philosophy, I must probably concern myself with either an intersection of at least philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology and biology, or an amalgam of all these

into a human information science.

### A position from which I can work

Having arrived, slowly, at this position - a position from which I think I can work, and one which I think I would not have achieved without having had the experiences of the last four years - I now feel more confident as regards tackling problems and proceeding in enquiry. I feel I have a greater sensitivity to what is going on, but I am thus aware that I need to be sensitised more.

### Protest and establishing discourse

#### **The Evangelical Issue**

If I look back to my correspondence with some of the governors over the evangelical issue, Chapter 15, I feel that I would have achieved a greater degree of exchange of information with them if I had started from a position of greater apparent sympathy with theirs. I think that they would have felt more comfortable if at the beginning they had perceived their holding more common ground with me. However, at the time I was as much protesting as trying to establish discourse. I might have done better if I had been more aware of the difficulties of combining the two.

Nevertheless, that issue is now past. I can now work only within the context - though it must be changing - which exists. I can only try to achieve what I can within the constraints - however lasting - imposed by the forces I have already set in action.

Metaphysics has different meanings

Some dictionaries of philosophy on metaphysics p.70

The Pan Dictionary of Philosophy.

A.R. Lacey's A Dictionary of Philosophy.

The Oxford companion to the mind.

R.G. Collingwood's metaphysics: presuppositions p.74

Collingwood differs from Aristotle.

Thales.

Anaximander.

Anaximenes.

Aristotle and Collingwood.

"Old" metaphysics and "New"

metaphysics p.77

Old metaphysics.

New metaphysics.

Misunderstanding and contempt.

"Old" sense metaphysical speculation:  
the brain as a computer.

"New" sense suppositions.

A way behind this thinking.

Some examples of my "New" sense metaphysics.

Mental ceilings.

Unexpected success.

Concluding examples.

My interest in metaphysics p.83

Collingwood's influence.

Metaphysics in systemic terms p.83

I am an open complex system.

Stability from suppositions, in thinking

Circularity and stability.

Changing disjunction between my system and those of others.

Implied suppositional states.

Modification of Collingwood's metaphysics p.86

Conflict between different suppositional states, July 1990.

The discussion.

Outcome.

Metaphysical systems seen as consisting of: levels of suppositional states, and the relationships between these levels. p.88

Conflict.

Individual metaphysical systems.

Bits of knowledge about bits of knowledge.

Misunderstanding and contradiction.

Multiplication can reduce.

Confusion about a common set of conventions.

A table of possible suppositions of some multiplications. p.91

The table is a simplification.

Possible metalevels.

Complex system of knowing, even where there are formally organised conventions.

Systems of knowing where there are no formally organised conventions.

Conflict and argument.

Conflict about discipline.

Complex mixture of views.

Table of suppositions of three lines of thought about discipline. p.98

No decisions.

Content level and context level.

Schism.

Meetings over seven years.

Another set of suppositions.

Table of suppositions with more potential "pay off" p.103

Difficulty in sorting our suppositions.

Repayment of improved thinking.

Metaphysics to my mind: conclusion.

A.J. Ayer and R.G. Collingwood.

Metaphysics Has Different Meanings

In my chapter on the logical positivism of A. J. Ayer and the metaphysics of R. G. Collingwood inevitably I use the word metaphysics many times. I mention that the word has different meanings, and I try to show that, in my interpretation at any rate, metaphysics in Collingwood's sense is different from that sense which Ayer was attacking. In an attempt to be more clear, and in an effort to indicate my own interpretation of metaphysics more fully, I propose here, with the help of a couple of dictionaries of philosophy, to give a brief and inexhaustive outline of some of its meanings. Then I shall try to show what metaphysics means for me. This is because it seems to me that the study of some of the metaphysics of the systems in which I live and work has provided me with some useful tools for untying some of the knots in my understanding of my experience and action.

Some Dictionaries of Philosophy on MetaphysicsThe Pan Dictionary of Philosophy.

The Pan Dictionary of Philosophy 1979 p.212-213 gives a clear and concise account of a range of meanings of the word metaphysics. It tells us that 'metaphysics' has meant many and different things e.g:-

- i) an attempt to characterize being, existence or reality as a whole;
- ii) an attempt to explore the realm of the suprasensible, beyond the world of experience;
- iii) an attempt to establish indubitable first principles as a foundation for all other

knowledge;

iv) an attempt to examine critically what more limited studies take for granted.

The dictionary then points out that it has been argued that the achievement of some at least of these aims is in principle impossible, and that the human mind has no means of discovering facts outside the realm of sense experience. Mathematics is independent of experience only because it deals exclusively in tautologies. Perhaps most convincingly of all it has been argued that any attempt to characterise reality as a whole must inevitably use concepts originally developed to distinguish particular elements within reality and hence can only misuse them.

(This, in my view, is an example of a paradox engendered by turning a tool of thought expressed in words, upon itself. It is similar to the difficulty which eventually arose for the logical positivists when the verification principle, which they developed in an attempt to eliminate metaphysics, was turned upon itself. I try to make this clearer in my chapter on logical positivism and the metaphysics of R.G Collingwood.)

Further on, the dictionary points out that in the natural sciences and ordinary practical life we use a range of concepts and principles. (I would add here assumptions, presumptions, suppositions, presuppositions and prejudices) the examination of which is not part of the work of the scientist. From Kant onwards many philosophers have regarded the proper role of the metaphysician as being the systematic study of the fundamental structure of our thought. Kant argued that there was a fixed conceptual framework that every rational mind must adopt. Later thinkers argued that the framework might vary from time to time. R. G. Collingwood, in particular, saw metaphysics as the ex-

plication of the "absolute presuppositions" underlying the characteristic thought of this or that period of history. P. F. Strawson distinguished between descriptive metaphysics (descriptive of our thought about the world) and revisionary metaphysics, which attempts to produce a better structure. Any assessment process of a structure, however, presupposes some such structure so the metaphysician should be content to describe, or propose, ways of thinking, rather than to try to establish the right one. Also any given language is arguably biased towards a particular metaphysic and is therefore an intractable medium for the development of alternatives.

#### A. R. Lacey's A dictionary of philosophy

In A. R. Lacey's A Dictionary of Philosophy pp.128, 129, 130 we are told that physics is the study of nature in general and metaphysics arises out of, but goes beyond, factual questions about the world. A particular theory about what exists, or a list of existents can be called an ontology. Ontology studies being, in particular what there is e.g. material objects, minds, numbers, persons, facts, universals etc. The question then arises as to whether these things all 'are' in the same sense. Further on we are told that metaphysics is distinguished by its questions being general e.g. can we classify all that exists in to different fundamental kinds?

Further on speculative and descriptive metaphysics are mentioned. Speculative metaphysics is the construction of all embracing systems that cannot be tested by observation.

(I suggest, here, that the construction of all embracing systems must have been an ambitious aim throughout history, but, as knowledge has increased, it

has become even more ambitious. However, the construction of subsystems, or the examination of presupposed subsystems was a worthwhile enterprise, provided an awareness of the possible transcendability of their boundaries, the crossing of which would reveal a larger system on another level, was borne in mind.)

Descriptive metaphysics claims, we are told, to avoid the vices of speculative metaphysics, without abandoning metaphysics altogether, it being confined to analysing various concepts like substance, which it claims to show are basic and unavoidable. Taken as the name of a subject (bottom of page 29) 'metaphysics' is no longer a 'bad word', but the current mood, though far less restrictive than logical positivism, remains hostile to anti-common sense speculations, including idealist or sceptical systems.

### The Oxford Companion to the Mind

In the Oxford Companion to the Mind the entry on metaphysics tells us that metaphysics is usually taken to mean philosophical speculation beyond the current or even seemingly possible limits of science, and the development of more or less abstract systems intended to explain origins and purpose, phenomena of mind and matter, and the place of man in the universe---- The pejorative sense of 'obscure' and 'over speculative' is recent especially following attempts by A. J. Ayer and others to show that metaphysics is strictly nonsense. It goes on to talk about science necessarily being dependent on untestable assumptions which are by definition metaphysical. It later mentions a different current view developed by Norwood Russell Hanson and Thomas Kuhn that there is no such thing as a neutral, theory-free observation language which simply records 'the facts'; even the simplest observations and experiments must be made within the context of complex theoretical assumptions which cannot be objectively

verified or tested operationally and so may be said to be metaphysical. This leads to a more or less extreme relativism which rejects the notion of 'brute facts' and 'objective' observational data.

(Since starting this thesis I have come to favour relativism. I regard some forms of knowledge as more objective than others. As I do not believe in completely objective knowledge, I am not disturbed by rejecting 'brute facts.)

#### R.G. Collingwood's Metaphysics: Presuppositions

In his *Essay on Metaphysics*, at the beginning of chapter IV, R.G. Collingwood describes how, as he writes on the deck of a ship, he lifts his eyes and sees a piece of string. He finds himself thinking "that is a clothes-line" meaning that it was put there to hang washing on. Collingwood says that when he decided that the line was put there for that purpose, he was presupposing that it was put there for some purpose. Only if that presupposition is made does the question, "what purpose?" arise. If that presupposition were not made, if for example Collingwood had thought the line came there by accident, that question would not have arisen, and the situation in which Collingwood thought "that is a clothes-line" would not have occurred.

#### Collingwood differs from Aristotle

Collingwood's idea of metaphysics as the science of presuppositions seems to me to be different from Aristotle's "first philosophy" or metaphysics.

Collingwood describes how the term "metaphysics" derives from the Greek "ta meta ta phusica," the name given by later editors to a work by the Greek

philosopher Aristotle.

In the first book of the "Metaphysics" Aristotle says that metaphysics is the study of first principles and causes which determine existence in general. This is different from the studies of the separate sciences each of which deals only with a part, or an aspect, or a kind of existence. Another aim of metaphysics, according to Aristotle, is theology, "the study of the primary existent, which exhibits in its purest form the nature of being."

Aristotle includes in metaphysics the study of substance. Substances are those things which primarily exist, and which are prior to everything else in respect of existence, knowledge and explanation. Aristotle uses "substance" in two senses:

1) a whole or complete thing - whether an individual (e.g. a particular man) or the essence of a species; 2) the essential nature of a thing - "the what it is to be an X." In sense 1) substance is "prior in existence," in the sense that complete things can exist apart, whereas qualities of things can not exist apart from those complete things. In sense 2) substance is "prior in knowledge and explanation," in the sense that we know a thing better if we know what it is - what its essential nature is - than if we just know some of its qualities, or what its position is.

Aristotle in his "first philosophy" or "metaphysics" seems to me to take thinking further - to a descriptive rather than just a speculative level - than, for instance, the members of the Milesian school of Philosophy: Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes. I refer here to Diane Collinson's *Fifty Major Philosophers* pp. 1 to 7, and 22 to 26.

## **Thales**

Aristotle attributes to Thales the idea that everthing is made of water, that a magnet has a soul in it because it moves iron, and that all things are made of gods.

## **Anaximander**

Anaximander apparently held that all things come from a single primal substance which is not water nor any other known element; it is something neutral which is transformed into the various substances with which we are familiar.

## **Anaximenes**

Anaximenes apparently said that the fundamental substance was air; all the different substances are formed from air by different degrees of condensation.

## **Aristotle and Collingwood**

The metaphysics of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes seems to be old fashioned speculation while Aristotle's metaphysics seems to be more modern, being more descriptive than merely speculative - Aristotle's physics, according to Diane Collinson, speculated that matter could be analysed in to earth, air, fire and water -, and to be partly about what there can be seen to exist. Collingwood's metaphysics seems to be more about our thinking about what there is.

On the basis of scant research I have made a distinction between what I see as "Old" sense metaphysics and "New" sense metaphysics.

## "Old" Metaphysics and "New" Metaphysics

I have tried to show that the word metaphysics has had many different uses (I refer to *Philosophy Made Simple*, R. H. Popkin and A. Stroll, Ch III p.91 for a comprehensive overview) but, in an attempt at a simplification, I have found it useful to distinguish between what I consider to be two significant uses of the word. One use I call "Old" metaphysics, and the other "New." The "Old" originates from before the time of Aristotle, and the "New" probably evolved through thinking from Kant to Collingwood, and onwards.

### "Old" metaphysics

The "Old" sense refers to our thinking with deliberate conscious speculation about that which is outside our experience. I work partly on the basis of such speculation, particularly in the realms of human and systemic behaviour. (Elsewhere I have indicated that I believe human behaviour can be usefully considered in terms of systems theory).

### "New" metaphysics

The "New" sense metaphysics is, for me, about that which we unconsciously assume, suppose or presuppose in our thought. "Assuming" and "supposing" seem more conscious acts than "presupposing", but when interacting with other minds one can not always be sure of the degree of consciousness behind any particular apparent supposition of another mind.

Collingwood's metaphysics is based on his theory of suppositions.

### Misunderstanding and contempt

The range of uses of the word metaphysics and its obscurity induce misunderstanding and, in some cases, I suggest, contempt for metaphysics, though the latter is probably a twentieth century phenomenon.

Early metaphysicians were able to have a greater overall grasp of knowledge, though thinking would probably have been no easier because the context was necessarily smaller, diversity less, and hence tools for thought less in number and refinement. Perhaps this made for a more conducive climate than today's in which to ask questions about the fundamental nature of reality. Once questions which could be answered through experience were answered, the questions disappeared, but immediately new questions would have arisen. So the search for an absolute foundation for knowledge went on. Science has made advances, the answers to the old metaphysical questions becoming physics (our word physics coming from a Greek word 'Phusis' meaning nature). However, presumably there still exists "Old" sense metaphysics in the pursuit of modern physics in the form of speculations. So "Old" and "New" sense metaphysics are probably significant in physics today though in the main both are probably inaccessible to the non-expert. However, in my view, in some current areas of enquiry, metaphysics in both my "Old" and "New" senses is still accessible to the non-expert. "Education" is an example.

### "Old" sense metaphysical speculation: the brain as a computer

A modern example of an "Old" sense metaphysical speculation about human behaviour is the idea that the brain is a sort of information processing machine, analogous in some ways to a highly complex computer.

(The origins of my apparent autonomy and private and unique occupation of my body remain seemingly unexplained by this, so I have offered a tentative, simple, and inexhaustive speculation about mind in Chapter 12 on Cartesian dualism.)

### **"New" Sense Suppositions**

Among "New" sense suppositions here are a) that the working of the brain would be susceptible to analysis (a computer having necessarily been built up from more reduced states using systematic reasoning), and b) that what we consider as "cause and effect" thinking is naturally applicable to this idea.

### **A Way Behind This Thinking**

A way behind this reductionist view might be to speculate on the brain being a complex system, the whole of which is greater than the sum of its parts. This would be another example of an "Old" sense modern speculation

It would suggest, i.e. suppose ("New" sense metaphysics) that the brain would not yield all its secrets through analysis but that it might be susceptible to systemic mathematics.

In reductionist thinking the "why?" seems actual, as opposed to being dependent on perception, and hence it distracts attention from the "what?" In other words, the success of reductionist explanations - i.e. "why" it works - as applied to mechanisms, such as clockwork clocks, can lead to the belief that all systems, however complex, could be explained in mechanistic terms if their workings could be analysed sufficiently. However, some more complex systems, such as systems of

interacting human beings, do not yield to mechanistic explanation, and their workings can be better understood - though not necessarily explained - in systemic terms; this requires them to be considered for "what" they are, i.e. complex systems of interacting parts which do not behave in the predictable and precise way in which the parts of a mechanism do.

Some examples of my "New" sense metaphysics  
from my experience

**Mental ceilings**

I became aware of what seems quite a powerful example of a "New" type of metaphysics through a conversation I had with one of our staff. I was discussing a thirteen year old boy in my 5th Form (leaving year) Maths set with the Teacher of the Junior Form (the year group containing 7 year olds, a year below the 1st Form) who had taught this particular boy five years previously. He had had difficulties with academic work, and he had a record of illness, poor eyesight, and partial deafness, and he had been labelled as being of relatively low academic ability. After the boy had taken his entrance test to our school, the Junior Form Teacher had been reluctant to accept him on the ground that with his apparent difficulties he would not be able to cope in our school because there would not be sufficient opportunity for the sort and amount of extra help she felt he would need. This I think was a sound view and the one I would have taken myself. However, the point of my story lies in the account the teacher gave me of the conversation between her and the boy's parents.

The parents had been more than a little upset by the suggestion that their son should not come to us, and when the Junior Form Teacher advised that the

school was unsuitable because, fundamentally, of the boy's low mental ability, they pleaded with her to take him, saying that he would surely get better. The teacher responded by saying that the boy had not got the equivalent of measles in a mental sense, and hence would not improve relatively to the rest of the form. This suggested to me that this teacher, for whom I have great respect as a practitioner and a person, held a firm view that each individual had fixed ceilings to their mental capability, and, more importantly and crucially to my story, that, as the result of tests and observation, that she could say what these ceilings were.

As I have said, my own view is that this teacher was right to try not to accept the child in question because it has been our experience that children of such an apparent academic ability at the Junior Form stage generally do not have time to reach a respectable standard at Common Entrance six years later.

However, the point of my story concerns the apparent firmness of the teacher's convictions about the rigidity of the ceilings of individual's potentials and how she was able to say what or where these ceilings were. In other words I was interested in, and at variance with, her theoretical standpoint, while simultaneously in agreement with her intended action within the context.

My own theory is that it is safe but unproductive to assume mental ceilings, but, because we are dealing with open systems, it is not safe to assume that we can say what or where these ceilings are, particularly when we project time. I suggest it is important in practice to countenance the possibility of such a view as mine in order to be aware enough to be able to reduce some of the circularities involved in the subconscious part

of the setting of standards through implied expectations.

### **Unexpected Success**

This point about standards was evidenced by my discovery that this particular boy, who eventually did attend our school, had in fact done far better in his Common Entrance Exam., taken in his 5th year, than any of the Junior, 1st and 2nd year teachers had expected. This achievement I attribute more than a little to the inevitable tension imposed on those of us who teach from the 3rd Form onwards up to the Common Entrance Exam. in the 5th Form, by the awareness of this ultimate external assessment for the pupil, and, just as importantly, for the teacher.

In the particular case I have described, I knew something of the boy's history when I took him on in the 3rd year. I suggest that prejudice in my expectations of him was to a great extent overridden by what I felt I was expected to do for him. This was simply because he would be expected to take Common Entrance and his official results would eventually be accessible to his parents and our headmaster and staff.

The Junior Form teacher ended our conversation by saying she thought we had done a lot for the boy.

### **Concluding Examples**

As concluding examples, I offer as an "Old" sense, but modern day, metaphysical speculation the idea that the brain is analogous to a computer. As "New" sense metaphysics I suggest the supposition that the brain has prescribed ceilings of mental capability which it is supposed, in my view erroneously, that we can locate. The former I have come across as an overt conscious

speculation, and therefore I categorise it as "Old" sense, metaphysics. The latter I have only experienced as an implied supposition and so I categorise it as "New" sense metaphysics.

### **My Interest in Metaphysics**

#### **Collingwood's influence**

My interest in metaphysics began through my reading R. G. Collingwood's *Essay on Metaphysics* in 1983 on the recommendation of Mr. Brookes. The positivism versus Metaphysics arguments, Ayer versus Collingwood in particular, were all the more interesting for the fact that I had previously read and heard Ayer, and, having specialised entirely in sciences since the age of 16, I had been influenced by him. Up to this point the meaning of metaphysics was unclear to me. This was perhaps not altogether surprising because, as I have tried to show, its meanings are many and various. However, the Collingwood/Ayer argument, and the positivists' apparent obsession about dispensing with metaphysics have helped me develop an interest which, combined with Collingwood's ideas particularly, has provided me with some useful tools for understanding my experience.

#### **Metaphysics in Systemic Terms**

##### **I Am An Open Complex System**

I have come to think of metaphysics in what I consider are systemic terms. I see myself as an open complex system containing subsystems some of which are physical, tangible and visible, and others of which are psychological. My thinking apparatus can be thought of as consisting of interlinked open information systems in various states of flux. My ability to understand some things, though it may be partly genetically

prescribed, must, in my view, be to a large extent dependent on the development of these open systems which occurs as a result of their inputs from, and interactions with, those things which can be seen as being external to them. Hence I accept the view that I have predetermined limits to my ultimate capability, but I consider this to be of little practical significance because I do not accept that anyone can actually say what these limits are. I therefore take the same view of the children I teach; consequently I am prepared to be surprised by them. What I am saying here could be said to be in a sense metaphysical because it is speculation.

#### **Stability From Suppositions in Thinking Systems, i.e. minds**

The notion of open systems entails changes at greater and lesser rates which are not necessarily continuous. However, it also entails a degree of stability for the system to exist as a system at all. I suggest that in the consciousness of a thinking system, some of this necessary stability is provided by suppositions which provide bases and boundaries, however temporary, for thought. The crossing of, or the getting behind, these bases can and does raise understanding to a higher level; but, I suggest that too frequent a breaching of metaphysical boundaries can lead to an unmanageable instability of thinking. Hence I speculate that my own personal mechanism has an inbuilt resistance to too rapid a rate of conversion of metaphysics in to physics, or, in Collingwood's words suppositions in to propositions. To ensure a necessary degree of stability, systems have feedback loops or circularities; I suggest that suppositions, in Collingwood's sense, act in thinking as feedback reflectors and thus enhance mental stability.

## **Circularity and Stability**

My thinking system therefore must contain the necessary degree of circularity in order to exist with tolerable stability. The metaphysical component provides the turning points for the feedback loops, and, together with content consisting of more easily justifiable facts, provides a stability with a not too rapid rate of change in relation to that which changes outside the system.

I regard this idea of a rate of change in a system relative to that which is outside the system, in the light of my remarks, in my section on looking at change, about the relativity in the observation of change. The point I tried to make there was as follows.

### **Changing Disjunction Between My System and Those of Others**

Through this study I have tried to look at metaphysics, particularly that within my experience, and I am under the impression that, as a result, my metaphysical system has changed at a rate greater than those of others within my direct experience. Hence, as far as interaction with other individuals is concerned, I have had need to be aware of a changing disjunction between my particular system and the systems of others.

### **Implied suppositional states**

My theory of implied suppositional states as "New" sense metaphysics was initiated by my reading R. G. Collinwood's *Essay on Metaphysics*. In this book Collingwood puts forward his theory of presuppositions, relative and absolute, which is the basis of his metaphysics. I discuss this at greater length in my

section on A. J. Ayer's logical positivism and R. G. Collingwood's metaphysics, but I would like to indicate here how Collingwood's metaphysics has been of use to me practically.

### Modification of Collingwood's Metaphysics

I have modified Collingwood's metaphysics in attempting to interpret my experience. This has entailed identifying suppositional states. In some cases these might more accurately be termed assumptions because they may have been made through conscious awareness; in other cases they may be what Collingwood means by presuppositions because they may have been made without conscious awareness. When a supposition, which might or might not have been made consciously, necessarily entails other suppositions implicitly, then I accept that these are necessarily presuppositions relative to the original supposition.

### Conflict Between Different Suppositional States, July 1990

An example of conflict between different suppositional states arose recently in conversations I had with our headmaster. I was asking him if he and I could discuss the attitudes and behaviour of the senior boys in the school because I, and most other staff, thought they had recently been unsatisfactory. His response was that he would discuss it with me but he felt we would be bound to get year groups like the one in question from time to time. A supposition here seems to be that some year groups will be naturally worse than others. Another supposition here, which seems to be a presupposition relative to the first one, is that either there is nothing that can be done about my concern or there is no need to try to do something about it; i.e. it need not be a concern.

## **The Discussion**

When eventually we had our discussion, which I strove hard to ensure was quite amicable, I offered some proposals which mainly entailed my doing some extra work in the form of policing and pastoral care. However, the potential for our meeting to produce effective outcomes seemed hamstrung by the headmaster's inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that the concern might be alleviated. There seemed to be intractable conflict between our views on what children can and ought to be expected to do at given ages.

A fundamental difference in our suppositional states seemed to be that I believed children could be expected to do almost anything, while the headmaster seemed to think there were definite limits at particular ages.

A few years ago I would have argued my case more vigorously and passionately, but my feeling now is that this method would merely inflame the manifestation of the conflict between our metaphysical positions. My tactics now will be to give the headmaster time to think about what I have said, and then to go back to him and ask if I can try to do some of the things I suggested, just to see if they work. Thus I may be able to resolve some of the conflict between our metaphysical states by practical demonstration rather than by theoretical arguments.

## **Outcome**

As it happened I did not have to go back to the headmaster.

I thought I would wait to see how the new academic year turned out. By the end of the following Spring

Term (i.e. two terms later) the headmaster was concerned enough about behaviour to put it on the agenda for the end of term staff meeting. I take up this story towards the end of my chapter on discipline where I describe what I called the 1991 initiative on discipline.

Metaphysical Systems Seen as Consisting of: Levels of Suppositional States, and the Relationships Between these Levels.

Conflict Between Metaphysical Systems Seen as Conflict Between Suppositional States

Conflict

As I said in my introduction, issues arise out of conflict, and conflict is an almost inevitable consequence of interaction between two or more individuals.

Individual metaphysical systems

Each individual has what can be regarded as his or her own metaphysical system which is a systemic phenomenon with a high degree of self conservation. This is because a metaphysical system can be regarded as not only various levels of bits of information (bits of knowledge) in a system of knowing, but also the relationships between the bits of information in that system.

Bits of knowledge about bits of knowledge

An individual's metaphysical system consists of bits of knowledge about bits of knowledge at different levels of knowing; the system entails relationships between these levels. Bits of knowledge can be

metaphysical in relation to yet other bits of knowledge. "Metaphysical" in this sense is a relative term. Each bit of metaphysical knowledge is therefore at a different metaphysical level, for the sake of argument a higher one, from the bits of knowledge it is about. The bits of knowledge at the lower metaphysical level can be about other bits of knowledge at an even lower metaphysical level. Hence there can be shown to be a scale of metaphysical levels. This is related to Russell's theory of logical types and Collingwood's theory of relative and absolute presuppositions. These two theories I have found useful. They have led me to an assumption in my thinking which is that the confusion in and between metaphysical and or logical levels is an important factor leading in many cases to lack of understanding, misunderstanding and even paradox.

### Misunderstanding and contradiction

#### Multiplication can reduce

As an example of a misunderstanding leading to a contradiction which can be reduced to a degree of simplicity, in theory, let us take the fairly common surprise expressed by more than a few children when they are told that the result of multiplying, say, 0.3 by 0.5 gives the answer 0.15 which is smaller than either 0.3 or 0.5

I will set out the relevant levels, as I see them, in a table on pages 91, 92 and 93. The misunderstanding may be based on a supposition that numbers always get bigger under multiplication. In the attempt to resolve these difficulties, conflict inevitably arises between the metaphysical systems of the one who understands and the one who does not.

## Confusion About a Common Set of Conventions

These difficulties can be resolved for many people without too much trouble because the misunderstandings arise out of confusion about a common set of conventions, i.e. the decimal system. The system of knowing, which is the convention, is common here because it is in common use. Once enough of the public metaphysics is achieved, understanding within these limits is achievable. Not understanding and misunderstanding arise partly as the result of an individual not achieving the metaphysics of a particular relationship, or, more often perhaps, the individual's substituting his or her own metaphysics in an attempt to make sense of the experience.

### Table.

In the table on pages 91, 92 and 93 each column contains some of the suppositions on which the multiplication in its bottom level F, is based. E.g. column 1 is about some of the suppositions behind  $3 \times 5 = 15$ . Each level supposes the level immediately above it in the same column, e.g. E1 supposes D1 etc.

A table of possible suppositions of  
some multiplications

Column 1	Column 2
	1 means one individual unit.
A1	A2
1 means one individual unit.	0.1 means one tenth of one, i.e. one of the ten equal parts which result from dividing one by 10.
B1	B2
3 means three ones together in a group (They can be separated by division)	0.3 means three lots 0.1 in a group. (This also supposes "threeness" i.e. B1)
C1	C2
3+3 means three lots of one in a group added to another three lots of one in a group.	0.3+0.3 means three lots of 0.1 in a group added to three lots of 0.1 in a group
D1	D2
3x5 means 3+3+3+3+3 which means five lots three added together.	0.3x5 means 0.3+0.3+0.3+0.3+0.3 which means five lots of 0.3 added together.

E1

E2

**Table continued**

$3 \times 5 = 15$  Five times  
three is fifteen.  
(Fifteen is bigger  
than three).

$0.3 \times 5 = 1.5$  Five times  
0.3 is 1.5 (1.5 is  
bigger than 0.3)

Column 3

1 means one individual  
unit.

A3

0.1 means one tenth of  
one, i.e. one of the  
ten equal parts which  
result from dividing  
one by 10.

B3

0.3 means three lots of  
0.1 in a group. (This  
also supposes "threeness"  
i.e. BI)

C3

$0.3 + 0.3$  means three  
lots of 0.1 in a group  
added to three lots of  
0.1 in a group

D3

$0.3 \times 5$  means  $0.3 + 0.3 + 0.3$   
 $+ 0.3 + 0.3$  which means

five lots of 0.3 added together.

E3

$0.3 \times 0.5 = 0.15$  means 0.5 lots i.e.  $\frac{1}{2}$  a lot of 0.3 (added together). (0.15 is smaller than 0.3)

F3

### **The Table is a Simplification**

Clearly the table is a simplification of part of the "system of knowing", and takes little account of the relationships between columns, e.g. division and addition are supposed commonly but this is not incorporated, though that B2 and B3 suppose B1 is included. If more were included it would become very complicated, but it is nevertheless important to be aware of the ultimate complexity of such an exercise. My selection of levels could have been made differently, as there are more considerations that could have been made, and hence potentially more levels; but, there is a progression down the columns and it can be seen that each level is about the level below. Misunderstandings can result from forming suppositions on the basis of the progression in one column, and then applying them to the progression in another column. Columns 1 and 2, for example, support the erroneous supposition that

numbers always increase under multiplication.

### **Possible metalevels**

A point of the table is not only to show some possible metalevels in a system of knowing in which there are formally organised conventions, but also to indicate how incorrect suppositions can be formed on the basis of a particular progression of levels. E.g., columns 1 and 2 support the erroneous supposition that numbers always increase under multiplication. This is a piece of incorrect metaphysics arising from the relationship between levels, i.e. the progression itself. This shows how metaphysics can be seen as arising not only at different levels of knowing, but also from the progression of the different levels of knowing. Hence, for me, metaphysics is about not only knowledge about knowledge, but also the relationships between levels of knowledge.

### **Complex System of Knowing, Even Where There are Formally Organised Conventions**

The interconnectedness of the columns and levels in the table, combined with the interconnectedness of all the potential columns and levels which could be set out for this example, demonstrates how a complex system of knowing arises even where there are formally organised conventions. It is the complexity of the system, and, in particular, the circularities inherent in the system (which I have not indicated in my table) which underpin the system's inherent stability and hence it's conservatism. (An example of a circularity of suppositions arises from asking whether multiplication supposes division or vice versa. Similarly, and not unrelated, there is the question of what is supposed in thinking of "oneness": are parts of one, i.e. fractions, presupposed by the thought of one whole, or

is one presupposed by the thought of a fraction? These latter questions are examples of problems which can arise in philosophy about something practical, e.g. multiplication, without having practical significance themselves).

### **Systems of Knowing Where There are no Formally Organised Conventions**

In systems of knowing in which there are no formally organised conventions, and in which there are influential commonly held views, there will, in many cases, be fairly permanent speculative views at variance with one another. Speculative views rest partly on relatively stable mental states such as, in Collingwood's usage: assumptions, suppositions, and presuppositions (in which he included faith).

[In his Essay on Metaphysics Collingwood makes distinctions between these, but he can be confusing in places. I shall refer to these distinctions, in an attempt to make them clearer, in a separate section on Collingwood's metaphysics]

#### **Conflict and argument**

When metaphysical systems conflict, and argument ensues, misunderstanding probably almost invariably exists from the beginning, and will do so till the end, unless metaphysical changes occur on one side or other, or, more probably, both.

#### **Conflict about discipline**

As an example of conflict between different metaphysical systems within a system of knowing with no formally organised conventions in the sense that my arithmetical example has them, I offer my perceptions

of some of the arguments put forward about the origins of, and potential remedies for, some of the discipline problems in the school. I indicate only some of what I see as the relevant levels.

### **Complex Mixture of Views**

Because this is about a complex mixture of views about a concern arising from a complex of components, there could of course be different lists of levels of suppositions, depending upon whose view is examined. However, there are certain suppositions which I suggest can be assumed to have existed on the basis of what people have said in meetings.

### **Table**

In the table on pages 98 and 99 the lists of suppositions relate to three separate lines of thought which I felt I could identify.

One of these was that of a group of staff who felt that there were significant deficiencies in the functioning of several other staff and the headmaster. Column A relates to this group.

Another was the line of thought of a group of staff who felt that the concerns arose as a result of deficiencies in the headmaster. Column B relates to this group.

The other was the line of thought of the headmaster. Column B can relate to this group if "some staff" is substituted for "headmaster".

The initial suppositions: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, seemed to me to be unanimously held in these discussions.

In Column A there seems a degree of circularity through (i) (a) and (i)(b); likewise in Column B through (i)(b) and (i)(c); all these have been labelled (i) as they seem to occupy the same level.

Table of suppositions of three lines of  
thought about discipline

**Suppositions which seemed primary and  
unanimously held**

1. Opinions of an individual are likely to change as a result of that individual's participation in discussion.
2. Attitudes of individuals are likely to change as result of changes in their opinions.
3. Generalised behaviour of an individual, singly, changes as a result of changes in attitudes.
4. Functioning of individuals changes as a result of changes in generalised behaviour.
5. Functioning of school changes as a result of changes in functioning of individual staff:

Table continued

Column A	Column B
A(i)(a) Deficiencies exist in functioning of some staff and that of headmaster	B(i)(a) Headmasters can be changed Deficiencies exist in the functioning of the headmaster
A(i)(b) Deficiencies exist in functioning of the school as a system	B(i)(c) Deficiencies exist in the functioning of the school as a system
A(ii) Functioning of the system can be changed by asking individuals to change, <u>without imposing permanent tensions within the system</u>	B(ii) Functioning of the system can be changed by asking the headmaster to change
A(iii) Something could be done to improve the functioning of the system	B(iii) Something could be done to improve the functioning of the system
A(iv) Something should be done to improve the functioning of the system	B(iv) Something should be done to improve the functioning of the system
A(v) If we think more clearly about how individuals ought to function, describe this to them and ask them to adopt it, then they will improve and our organisation will function better.	B(v) If we think more clearly about how the headmaster should function, describe this more desirable functioning to him and ask that he adopt it, then he will come to function in a more desirable way.

The table above is an attempt to set out some of the suppositions which seemed to underpin three, including possible substitutions, significant positions taken up in many meetings we used to have about discipline.

## **No Decisions**

No decisions to take action were made. This, perhaps, was not surprising given the suppositions. However, there was much discussion which included criticism of individuals' practices, and, as I describe in a later section devoted to this subject, the arguments became quite acrimonious at times. Outcomes of the meetings consisted of appeals from various quarters, including the headmaster, for more consistency and firmness, and, from some staff, appeals for fear inspiring behaviour from the headmaster.

## **Content Level and Context Level**

There is an important point, which is related to the theory of logical types and the notion of levels of discourse, to add here. It is as follows. The fact that the arguments became acrimonious indicates strongly that much of the argument resulted partly from conflict at a personal level between the personalities involved, as opposed to merely from conflict between their views. The argument was therefore not only at a content level but also at a context level.

Perhaps any argument has the potential thus to acquire new levels as a result of the suppositions which can arise or be revived in one participant about other parties to the conflict, when he or she is contradicted.

## **Schism**

I suggest argument can have the potential to become a self escalating schism, what Watzlawick called a symmetrical schism, because of the inherent potential for competition to be perceived by the participants. I refer to the idea of schismogenesis in Chapter 19.

## **Meetings Over Seven Years**

Discussions with bases similar to those outlined above took place at several meetings over a period of at least seven years, during which there were a few staff changes, and in the middle of which there was a change of headmaster. The fact that very little, if any, effective change in functioning was made, suggests that the suppositions of all the parties described lacked potential for practical efficacy.

## **Another Set of Suppositions**

Another set of suppositions, on which more recent action was based, seemed to result in more profit. The bases of the position may be outlined as follows.

A system's functioning can be changed permanently by altering existing, or introducing new, permanent components within the system. Part of the difficulty of changing the functioning of a mind is that it is impossible to get inside a mind to change permanent components. These components must be identified as imposing "tensions" on, and therefore being external to, subsystems within the bigger system which is the mind. Permanent control tensions are much more easily put in place outside a mind than inside it. Examples of these tensions are rules, laws, official systems of punishment and reward. Hence suppositions with more potential "pay off" could be as follows.

Table of suppositions with more potential "pay off"

1. Deficiencies exist in the organisation of the school ( a system)	There is circularity, i.e. self control of the system through feedback, between 1. & 2.
2. Deficiencies exist in the functioning of the school (as a system)	To attend to deficiencies we have to "get outside" the circularity conceptually
3. Deficiencies exist in the functioning of individual staff and children in the school	
4. Functioning of individual staff and children can be changed by imposing permanent tensions external to them within the system	
5. Something could be done to improve the organisation and hence the functioning of the system	
6. Something should be done to improve the organisation and hence the functioning of the system.	
7. If we think more clearly about how systems of individuals (who are themselves systems) behave, and how their behaviour can be changed, then we can make more effective changes and our organisation can function better as result. (i.e. we have to bear in mind the idea of system control and hence feedback)	

## **Difficulty in Sorting Out Suppositions**

It is hard to sort out suppositions and to be satisfied that enough have been exposed and that they have been sorted into appropriate levels. We also don't know when what we think of as suppositions are, or have become, propositions in some minds, but, as I explain later, as long as they are believed when they become propositions, I am not sure that it makes any difference. My feeling is that in systems of knowing in which there are no formally organised conventions, as in my second example, there is a potentially non-finite variety of suppositions and levels. More exploration would be required to support or refute this, but, as regards this enquiry now, the further justification of method does not seem to me to matter. It is sufficient to show that the concerns repay analysis, which includes analysis of the metaphysics, combined with a view of how systems function and hence, probably, also some analogical thinking.

## **Repayment of Improved Thinking**

For my account of how I feel the latter type of improved thinking has to some extent been repaid I refer to my Chapter on discipline, the creation of the senior master and the 1991 initiatives in particular, Part IV, Chapter 16.

## **Metaphysics to my mind: conclusion**

My interest in metaphysics was initiated by Mr. Brookes who put me on to reading R.G. Collingwood.

In this section I have tried to indicate how I sorted out some of the meanings of metaphysics. I have also tried to show how it seems to me I have made some practical use out of my simplification of Collingwood's

metaphysics. In Part IV, Issues and experiences, I give further examples of, and make more references to, conflicts of metaphysical systems. However, for further illustration, here I include a list of 51 (number not significant) suspected suppositions.

### Fifty one Suspected Suppositions

Fifty one propositions which, I suspect, in some minds function as suppositions which, in my view, can lead to misunderstanding and inappropriate thinking. I do not discuss the propositions here; I list them merely as examples which are perhaps provocative.

1. A humanly accessible objective reality exists.  
(Some uses of the word truth can seem to suppose this.)
2. A universal reality exists.
3. Effects always have causes which can be explained in words.
4. General laws can be induced from information gained from particular contexts.
5. Clock time is the only time.
6. Time is infinitely divisible.
8. Variations in individuals' times are not relevant to organisation.
9. Freedom can be decontextualised; complete freedom is possible.
10. Judgements about issues in contexts can be

legitimately made on the basis of general principles derived in the abstract.

11. Moral absolutes exist independently of emotion.
12. Ethics exist independently of emotion.
13. Attitudes can be diagnosed unerringly from behaviour, including verbal and non-verbal communication.
14. Attitudes can often be changed (transitive) quickly with argument and exhortation.
15. Problems in functioning systems can be dealt with once and for all.
16. Generalised behaviour, e.g. inquisitiveness, can be modified by attending to one or a few particular examples of it.
17. Feeling and reasoning are separate functions.
18. Respect is an identifiable single behavioural entity.
19. Respect from children is an essential prerequisite of effective interaction with them.
20. Each person is an organism which changes physically and mentally but which has indefinable properties which do not change: a persisting identity which carries with it a certain persisting level of capability and persisting responsibility.
21. Individuals have ceilings of ability.
22. It can be known when an individual has reached his

or her maximum potential.

23. Individuals can function at a consistent level of intensity of activity throughout the day, and week.
24. Each individual learns at a continuous rate and progresses at a rate closely similar to that of those in the same age group.
25. Each individual's progress in school work is completed by the time he or she reaches the school leaving age.
26. The range of topics which children can study at any one period in their education is extendable.
27. Individuals need to be compelled to go to school until the school leaving age, but not after it, irrespective of the standard they have achieved.
28. After the school leaving age, individuals do not need basic education any more, irrespective of the standard they have achieved.
29. It is not right to expect children to do formal lessons, i.e. sitting at desks writing in exercise books, before the age of seven.
30. Individuals can be divided into some who are naturally humanities students, and others who are naturally science students.
31. Some individuals/children can not do some subjects, e.g. some people just can not do mathematics.
32. It is better to have extensive assessments in -

frequently, e.g. at ages 4, 7, 11 and 14 years, rather than less extensive assessments more frequently.

- 32a. is based on the following suppositions, among others:-
  - b. i) children always perform of their best for an assessment;
  - ii) children progress at similar and continuous rates.
33. When a child has worked through her or his, for example, first year work, he or she is necessarily ready to tackle the second year work.
34. It is better for sixth form children to study only three or four subjects, and in many cases to give up English altogether, rather than to continue with a wider range of subjects which includes their own language. (This is partly based on the previously mentioned supposition that some people are naturally arts students and others are naturally science students).
35. Good academic qualifications in a limited range of, perhaps, three or four subjects, i.e. A levels, indicate good potential for coping with complex demands of careers.
36. A clear distinction can be made between academic and non-academic subjects.
37. Children's progress is not hampered by having a six week - in some cases eight or nine week-, i.e. the length of the summer holidays, break from school work.
38. It is desirable to extend the range of subjects in

the curriculum without extending the overall time available for teaching and learning them.

39. Close attention to grammar is necessary for learning Latin but not for learning English.
40. Teachers can not be taught much about how to be an effective teacher; good teachers are born so.
41. A good teacher is aware of all that is happening in his or her classroom.
42. Most of a teacher's functioning can be assessed using criteria expressed in words.
43. A teacher once trained to teach at a certain level, can function satisfactorily in any school at that level.
44. Discussion is an effective way of establishing consensus and reconciliation.
45. Argument is an effective way of changing other people's views.
46. Rights exist independently of being granted.
47. Words convey exact meaning from one individual to another.
48. Norm related standards are a better guide to the overall level of standards in education than are criterion related standards.
49. An individual's general character and ability can be adequately assessed on the basis of particular things he or she says and does in particular contexts.

50. The use of the word "all" implies that all of a set, class or context is accessible or apprehendable.
51. To change one's view is to lose credibility, irrespective of the passage of time.

**A.J. Ayer and R.G. Collingwood**

Having been previously influenced by A.J. Ayer I was intrigued by Collingwood's defence of metaphysics, in his book *An Essay on Metaphysics*, against Ayer's attack in his book *Language Truth and Logic*. Consequently I felt moved to write the following chapter on this conflict.



CHAPTER 9.

Conflict between the logical positivism of A.J. Ayer and the metaphysics of R.G. Collingwood. p.113

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CHAPTER 9.CONFLICT BETWEEN THE LOGICAL POSITIVISM  
OF A.J. AYER AND THE METAPHYSICS OF  
R.G. COLLINGWOOD. (1986)

Conflict between positivism and metaphysics became more apparent to me through reading R.G. Collingwood's reaction, in his *Essay on Metaphysics*, to A. J. Ayer's *Language Truth and Logic*, Chapter 1 of which is entitled *The Elimination of metaphysics*. The Argument can be traced further in Ayer's *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, which appeared in 1982, 42 years after Collingwood's *Metaphysics*. There is a related and more general conflict between hard edged scientifically based enquiry and that which is more contextually based, to which I shall refer later, but first I will consider the personalities involved in this particular disagreement.

A.J. Ayer

When Ayer wrote his *Language Truth and Logic* he was a 26 year old classicist who, I suspect, had been influenced by what he had heard from the members of the Vienna Circle who were predominantly physical scientists. Without going in to detail, it seems accepted now that the members of the Circle had intended to extract what they wanted from philosophy, and to banish the rest. Ayer, I suggest, had a young man's desire to debunk, particularly, in his case, what he thought was the stagnant philosophy in Oxford at the time. It is also probably significant that science was then considered by many academics as a somewhat dirty pursuit, and this perhaps, along with its precision and obvious utility, led Ayer to see a chance of using it as a basis for a revolution in philosophy, thus making an academic name for himself, and shocking the academic establishment at the same time.

### R.G. Collingwood

When R. G. Collingwood, also a classicist, responded to Ayer's dismissal of metaphysics, he was 50, twice Ayer's age, and had a background in the applied science of archaeology which was for him an essentially contextual, question asking pursuit of knowledge. He worked in Oxford as Waynflete Professor of Metaphysics but was isolated from the stagnant 'main line' group of which Ayer was particularly critical. Collingwood, in my view, realised Ayer was actually attacking a form of metaphysics which was to some extent different from his, Collingwood's. However, because of his belief in the importance of metaphysics, and because Ayer's attempt had been to dismiss all metaphysics, and no doubt also because he was irritated by the young man's popular success with his simplistic attack, he took up the argument.

### Language Truth and Logic

In *Language Truth and Logic* Ayer criticises what he calls the metaphysical thesis that philosophy affords us knowledge of a reality transcending the world of science and common sense. This, I suggest, is not metaphysics in Collingwood's sense. I shall try to explain what I mean later. However, Ayer does say it is possible to be a metaphysician without believing in a transcendent reality because many metaphysical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors, rather than to a conscious desire to go beyond the limits of experience. Ayer however finds it convenient to take the case of those who believe it is possible to have knowledge of a transcendent reality because, he contends, the arguments used to refute them can be applied to the whole of metaphysics. For me this immense generalisation engenders suspicion.

On p.55 Ayer states that philosophy, as a genuine branch of knowledge, must be distinguished from metaphysics. On p.50 he says we may accordingly define a metaphysical sentence as a sentence which purports to express a genuine proposition, but does, in fact, express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypothesis. As, he continues, tautologies and empirical hypotheses (tautologies) form the entire class of significant propositions, Ayer therefore felt justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are non-sensical.

### **The Verification Principle**

In the Central Questions of Philosophy, 1973, pages 23 and 24, Ayer refers to the verification principle thus:

"My own version of it, as expressed in my Language, Truth and Logic, was that a sentence is factually significant to any given person if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express - that is if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept it as being true or reject it as being false".

Meaning was also accorded to sentences expressing propositions like those of logic or pure mathematics, which were true or false only in virtue of their form, but with this exception, everything of a would-be indicative character which failed to satisfy the verification principle was dismissed as literally non-sensical. This can be stated more concisely as follows:

"any statement that is not either a formal statement (a statement in logic or mathematics), or empirically testable, is nonsensical".

(1)

## **The Verification Principle is a Metastatement**

In one sense the statement of the verification principle, which can be regarded as a metastatement (i.e. a statement about statements), could be considered as being on the same logical level as "a type" of metaphysical statement. I say "type" in the light of my ideas about different types of metaphysics which I tried to make clear in my section on metaphysics. However, as an example here I might change slightly the simplified version of the verification principle and write:

any statement that is either a formal statement or empirically testable is not nonsensical.

(2)

which, in light of the previously quoted simplified version, I assume the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle including A.J. Ayer would have considered true, but which I argue to be a metaphysical statement because it is meta to statements about the physical world. Hence, perhaps, one could argue that in trying to "eliminate" (Ayer's word) metaphysics, the logical positivists were in fact creating a kind of metaphysics which in one sense strengthened a claim for metaphysics.

### **Metaphysics and bits of knowledge**

In my section on metaphysics, I try to explain my idea that metaphysical is a relative term, there being different levels of bits of knowledge about other bits of knowledge at other levels. A bit of knowledge A can be metaphysical about another bit B, B can in turn be metaphysical about another bit C. Hence A could be described as being meta-metaphysical about C.

This is not the same as arguing that an attempt to eliminate metaphysics is in itself an implicit recognition of its existence, because that line overlooks the fact that the elimination attempt was aimed at eliminating a belief in the validity of metaphysics as opposed to metaphysics itself. All I am trying to point out-admittedly having been influenced by Collingwood - is that in thinking about this, and other issues we inevitably encounter, if we probe far enough we find suppositions which can not be validated: it is these suppositions which for me are the basis of Collingwood's metaphysics.

### Theory of logical types

I do not wish to prolong unduly a possibly rather fruitless theoretical argument, but, nevertheless, I suggest this to be a point at which to introduce an interpretation and application of the theory of logical types, which originates from Bertrand Russell. I will try to explain the theory and some of its applications, in Chapter 10. but it is worth saying here that it is a theory which, in the light of the work of Russell, Bateson and Watzlawick seems to have significance in mathematics, philosophy, psychology, animal behaviour, anthropology, sociology and systems theory.

### **Logical Types in Relation to Positivism Versus Metaphysics**

Returning to the positivism versus metaphysics argument, if the positivists would contend that Ayer's statement (1) and my modification (2) be on the same logical level as statements about the physical world (which I can not see that they can be) then (1) is a paradox because it is self referential, and therefore, because it is neither formal nor empirically testable, it is nonsensical. (2) is neither (a) a formal state-

ment nor (b) empirically testable (because all statements can never be tested) and, though it is consistent with the positivist doctrine, it must be nonsensical according to logical positivists because it does not fit into categories (a) and (b); but it clearly is not nonsensical because it is consistent with both positivist doctrine and common sense, and therefore arguably - but I am aware not necessarily - is itself metaphysics or meta-metaphysics. Hence I suggest the notion of metaphysical levels, which I try to show later are akin to Russell's logical levels, are usefully borne in mind when considering confusion arising between statements about the physical world and statements about statements about the physical world.

### **Logical Types**

My argument above against extreme positivism is based on the theory of logical types which has provided me with metaphors related to ideas about levels of thought which I have found applicable in many areas of my work. My argument is not the same as Collingwood's, though I believe it is closely related as far as mental processes are concerned.

I discuss logical types in Chapter 10.

### **Collingwood's Argument**

Collingwood's argument for the retention of metaphysics, is based on his theory of presuppositions.

In his *Essay on Metaphysics* Collingwood rejects the positivistic doctrine "that the only valid method of attaining knowledge is the method used in the natural sciences, and hence no kind of knowledge is genuine unless it either is natural science or resembles natural science in method," (*Metaphysics*

ch.XIV p.143). "What they (the positivists) failed to see," p.145 "was that 'fact' is a term belonging to the vocabulary of historical thought." Facts in natural science, for Collingwood, are historical facts. "It is a fact for the astronomer that at a certain time on a certain day a certain observer saw a transit of Venus taking place," p.145. p.146 "In the second place it was rash of the positivists to maintain that every notion is a class of observable (if you like historical) facts. This amounted to saying, what in fact positivists have always tried more or less consistently to say, that scientific thought has no presuppositions."

In ch.5, entitled The Science of Absolute Presuppositions, Collingwood refers to low-grade thinking (p.35). "In the lowest type of low grade thinking we are wholly unaware that every thought we find ourselves thinking is the answer to a question--- we are wholly unaware that the question arises from a presupposition. Propositions," (p.38-39), "are answers to questions and so entail presuppositions--- This work of disentangling and arranging questions, which in the preceding chapter I have called analysis, may be alternatively described as the work of detecting presuppositions". p.40-41, "---science and metaphysics are inextricably united and stand and fall together--- In saying this, I am assuming that metaphysics is the science of absolute presuppositions".

### **Ayer's Philosophy in the Twentieth Century**

In his *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, 1982, A. J. Ayer devotes a whole chapter to the philosophy of R. G. Collingwood. I was surprised to find this, because, although, as Ayer says, Collingwood's *Metaphysics* contains several references to Ayer's *Language Truth and Logic* and repeated condemnations of

'Logical Positivists' for basing their attacks on metaphysics upon a misunderstanding of the subject, I had been unable to find any reference to Collingwood's metaphysics in any of the books Ayer had written since *An Essay on Metaphysics* appeared. Then, 40 years after the appearance of the *Essay on Metaphysics*, Ayer writes that he believes he carried some responsibility for the appearance and content of Collingwood's book, and he devotes a section to the Theory of Absolute Presuppositions.

In his examination of Collingwood's Metaphysics Ayer writes p.198

"His first step is to advance the proposition that 'Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question'. As stated this is plainly false if it implies that a question has been posed in every case. We may perhaps assume Collingwood was thinking of scientific statements, and that he was adopting Bacon's thesis that science proceeds by torturing nature for answers, in legal language, putting her to the question. Collingwood's second proposition is that every question involves a presupposition. I doubt whether this is true either but it may be true of the sort of scientific questions that Collingwood has in mind."

Further on, on p.200, Ayer discusses Collingwood's prime example of a metaphysical proposition

"which is the proposition" God exists! Or rather it is only in moments of carelessness that he calls this a proposition, since he has already admitted that he agrees with his enemies, the logical positivists, that if it is construed as a proposition, it is senseless, or at least devoid of truth value. What he means to assert is that people have in different ages held the belief, which can fairly be described as the belief that God exists, though the content of this belief has varied with a change in the presuppositions which it represents."

Ayer then finds that "there would appear to be

some difficulty", p.201, "in the notion of someone's believing a presupposition and yet not thinking it true". Perhaps the use of the term 'belief' is misleading in this context. (I suggest 'belief' can be misleading in any context because it implies an element of doubt.) Ayer does not expand on this but he continues as follows.

"Absolute presuppositions are taken for granted. While they hold sway, the question of their truth or falsehood does not arise. This may shift the difficulty but I do not see that it removes it. After all, it is not being suggested that absolute presuppositions are unintelligible. They take the form of propositions although they are not so treated by those who adopt them. But (1) what about those who do not adopt them? (2) Why should they be limited to expounding them?"

[I suggest here that "they" are not necessarily limited so, because, to them, in the light of my theory of suppositional states, they are not absolute presuppositions but suppositions. Hence "they" can be aware of these suppositions being open to question, i.e. "they" can consider them at a meta-level of thought. Having considered them, "they" can then decide whether to adopt them in a speculative way or not. Hence they are not entirely limited to expounding them.]

(3) "If they can understand them at all," Ayer continues, "why can they not judge them to be false?"

## My Suggestions for What Collingwood's Answers Might Have Been

I suggest that Collingwood might have answered these questions by saying that 1) those who do not adopt particular absolute presuppositions either do not entail them in their discourse or they have gone a step or steps beyond them in their thinking.

For example, if hitherto they had presupposed everything to be governed by natural laws and then found this not to be the case, that presupposition would have ceased to be.

Collingwood might also have commented that the word 'adopt' is not applicable to absolute presuppositions because it implies intention directed at the presupposition. The holders of absolute presuppositions, in Collingwood's sense, do not direct intention or attention to absolute presuppositions because they take them for granted.

Further he might have answered (2) and (3) by saying that those who had previously not held a particular presupposition, while others had, were at liberty to judge them false and, if they wished, attempt to demonstrate their falsity to those who still held them. This is indeed probably the way in which, as Collingwood says, presuppositions change with time, though there would seem to be an important distinction to be made between communally held presuppositions (those maintained in existence through general discourse) and individually held presuppositions (those peculiar to individuals).

I suggest that a change in communally held presuppositions would often follow a change in individually held presuppositions, and that the spread of the change

could be fast or slow depending on the nature of the presupposition and the extent of communications. The change from thinking the world flat to thinking it spherical is an example.

### My thinking influenced by Collingwood

Clearly my thinking is strongly influenced by Collingwood, though, before knowing of Collingwood's work, I was influenced by Ayer considerably. Though I largely agree with Collingwood's treatment of positivism as far as I interpret it, I feel sure that Collingwood was aware that Ayer was not specifically attacking Collingwood's metaphysics; Ayer made no mention of this type of metaphysics in *Language Truth and Logic*, and it seems highly likely, from the way he argued, that he was not aware of it. However, because Ayer held that his arguments could be applied to the whole of metaphysics, Collingwood was inclined to counter Ayer's arguments, but on his, Collingwood's, terms, which were necessarily incompatible with Ayer's. I suggest that Collingwood was clearly aware of the different levels of knowledge which I have tried to indicate in relation to the theory of logical types, Part II Chapter 10, not only because this seems central to his theories of knowing, but also because Ayer, perhaps unwittingly, applied the same idea when attempting to dismiss a sort of metaphysics which had been arrived at through a misunderstanding of grammar.

### Metaphysics and a misunderstanding of grammar

On p.57 in *Language Truth and Logic* Ayer writes, "A simpler and clearer instance of the way in which a consideration of grammar leads to metaphysics is the case of the metaphysical concept of Being. The origin of our temptation to raise questions about Being, which no conceivable experience would enable us to answer

lies in the fact that, in our language, sentences which express existential propositions and sentences which express attributive propositions may be of the same grammatical form. For instance, the sentences 'Martyrs exist' and 'Martyrs suffer' both consist of a noun followed by an intransitive verb, and the fact that they have grammatically the same appearance leads one to assume that they are of the same logical type. It is seen that in the proposition 'Martyrs suffer' the members of a certain species are credited with a certain attribute, and, it is sometimes assumed that the same thing is true of such a proposition as 'Martyrs exist'. If this were actually the case, it would, indeed, be as legitimate to speculate about the Being of martyrs as it is to speculate about their suffering. But, as Kant pointed out (Vide The Critique of Pure Reason, 'Transcendental Dialectic', Book II, chapter iii, section 4) existence is not an attribute. For, when we ascribe an attribute to a thing, we covertly assert that it exists: so that if existence were itself an attribute, it would follow that all positive existential propositions were tautologies, and all negative existential propositions self contradictory; and this is not the case. (This argument is well stated by John Wisdom, Interpretation of Analysis, pp. 62, 63) so that those who raise questions about Being which are based on the assumption that existence is an attribute are guilty of following grammar beyond the boundaries of sense".

#### **My Suggestion For How Collingwood Would Have Replied**

My interpretation of Collingwood is such that I suggest he would have said that existence is an absolute presupposition implicit in discourse and psychologically inevitable; speculation about existence is linguistically possible but no further transcendental status can be achieved for it beyond that of an ab-

solute presupposition, which of course would be at a different logical level from that of transcendental knowledge about, or meta to, existence (which I am sure Collingwood would have agreed was unattainable). This is why I have suggested that Collingwood, although he realised Ayer was not actually attacking his, Collingwood's metaphysics, ostensibly defended metaphysics from Ayer's attacks by actually arguing for his own brand of metaphysics. The two respective arguments, therefore, do no actually map on to one another.

### **Content Level and Context Level in Disputes**

I shall try to show later that this metalinguistic point is important as far as my experience goes in dealing with day to day human conflict where so often disputes which are ostensibly about their particular content are actually a manifestation of personal antagonism at a different logical level, i.e. a context level.

### **Summary so far**

To summarise, Ayer's view of metaphysicians so stated in Language Truth and Logic was that they must begin with the evidence of their sense, that they would deny this and say that they were endowed with a faculty of intellectual intuition which enabled them to know facts that could not be known through sense experience. Collingwood, however does not seem to me to be arguing that his metaphysics is about claims to knowledge of such a transcendent reality, but rather that any attempt we make to think or talk about something inevitably entails automatic and unconscious assumptions, relative and absolute, which Collingwood calls presuppositions. It seems to amount to saying that one cannot cerebrate without unconsciously (or perhaps consciously) assuming or choosing a subject matter

which must have a relative base which is also assumed. The act of thinking requires an object which is thought about, the ultimate basis of which cannot be subjected to the positivists verification principle in order to be established as meaningful. This is because whatever is thought about is necessarily dependent on presuppositions which are necessarily of a different logical type from propositions of fact.

### **Confusion of Logical Types and Erroneous Metaphysics**

My suggestion here is that Ayer's point about confusion of logical types leading to erroneous metaphysics, such as the false assumption that existence is attributive, can be used to show that presuppositions are of a different logical type from (factual) propositions which necessarily contain presuppositions and therefore cannot justifiably be assessed using the same criteria as presuppositions. Very simply, Collingwood's presuppositions are implied existential propositions (adopting some of Ayers' terminology) and hence not attributive and therefore not of the same logical type as attributes.

### **Suicide of positivistic metaphysics**

Collingwood refers to this, I suggest, in a chapter called Suicide of Positivistic Metaphysics, p.162, where he seems to be defending his own type of metaphysics from unnamed but misguided positivists whose arguments, it seems, must have been much closer than Ayer's to mapping on to Collingwood's. On p.162 he writes

"In Chapter XIV I have in effect defined the positivistic mistake about metaphysics as the mistake of thinking that metaphysics is the attempt to justify by appeal to observed facts the absolute presuppositions of our thought. This attempt is bound to fail because these things, being absolute presup-

positions, cannot stand as the answers to questions, and therefore the question whether they are justifiable, which in effect is identical with the question whether they are true, is a question which cannot logically arise. To ask it is the hall-mark of pseudo-metaphysics".

### **Justifiability of Absolute Presuppositions**

This statement seems to be in fact in sympathy with Ayer because to ask such questions and also actually to believe answers to them could be found would seem to entail belief in transcendental powers. Further, although absolute presuppositions do not stand as answers to questions, I suggest they could be subject to question, and therefore, contrary to Collingwood, I suggest that questions of their justifiability could arise but at a different logical level from that at which an answer could be given. If this were not true our absolute presuppositions would necessarily always remain unknown to us and there could be no progression from metaphysics to science. (Questions about the nature of presuppositions would seem to be necessarily 'what' questions, whereas questions about their justification would seem to be necessarily "why questions".)

### **Ayer's Attack is on Pseudo Metaphysics**

Further down the page Collingwood continues: "It (the mistake) has developed in to the following syllogism:

"Any proposition" (all propositions?) " which cannot be verified by appeal to observed facts is a pseudo-proposition."

"Metaphysical propositions cannot be verified by appeal to observed facts."

"Therefore metaphysical propositions are pseudo propositions, and therefore nonsense. The argument has been set forth with ad-

mirable conciseness and lucidity by Mr. A. J. Ayer in his book Language Truth and Logic (1936)."

"What is given us as an attack on metaphysics is an attack on pseudo metaphysics".

It is in this last sentence that Collingwood actually acknowledges that he and Ayer are not actually arguing about the same area of thought. What they did argue about was a name, metaphysics.

### Ayer's later views

It is of some interest that at the end of a television interview with Bryan Magee in a series called Men of Ideas, when Magee had asked Ayer, "But it (Logical Positivism) must have had real defects. What do you now, in retrospect, think the main ones were?" Ayer replied, "Well I suppose the most important defect was that nearly all of it was false." (He gave a lot more detail saying that to this day the verification principle hasn't received a logically precise formulation and that you can not reduce even ordinary simple statements about cigarette cases and glasses and ash trays to statements about sense data - let alone the more abstract statements of science).

It is also of interest that 42 years elapsed between the publication of Collingwood's Essay on Metaphysics and Ayer's Philosophy in the Twentieth Century (1982) which is the only reference I have found, by Ayer to Collingwood's objection to Anti metaphysics. Most interesting is that in 1982 Ayer made no particular reference to Collingwood's idea of pseudo-metaphysics (Essay on Metaphysics p.163), which seems one of the few "mapping-on-points" of the two arguments, and his whole treatment of Collingwood's metaphysics is by no means a convincing refutation of Collingwood's particular metaphysics.

## The legacy of positivism

I do not consider that the argument which occurred back in the late thirties and early forties is directly relevant to my work as a teacher now, though perhaps the amount of attention I have given to it would suggest otherwise.

## Many different contexts in my work, and life: levels of knowing

Nonetheless, in my work I am confronted by manifold different contexts, all of which contain knowledge. I prefer to think of this knowledge as information at different levels of certainty (i.e. with degrees of supportive evidence), and of varying metaphysical status (e.g. suppositions relative and absolute). Discussing the Collingwood/Ayer argument has helped me realise not only the importance of being aware of both a positivistic approach and a Collingwoodian approach to information, but also the importance of an awareness of a perhaps limitless series of levels of knowing with metaphysical information as the mobile outside boundaries (plural because of relativity as regards levels); ignorance of these, I suggest, can lead to knots in understanding and even paradox. Examples of knots can be demonstrated, as I have tried to show, by turning Collingwood's theory of presuppositions (i.e. the words) and the positivists' theory of the verification principle (again the words) upon themselves. This is possible because they consist of words.

I refer at greater length, in my section on paradox, to paradox and misunderstanding, both of which can result from turning words upon themselves.

## **Words, language and logical levels.**

Words are clearly constituents of language. Language is a system which can easily be shown to have the potential to generate different logical levels because it can so easily be turned upon itself. Later, I shall try to show how other systems in human behaviour can profitably be seen to consist of logical levels, a lack of awareness of which can produce misunderstanding and paradox.

### **Beer, Bateson, Watzlawick and Russell:** **philosophy and system theory**

Through my reading of Beer, Bateson, and Watzlawick and, of course, Russell himself, I have been enabled to derive useful metaphors for understanding systems, principally with Russell's theory of logical types as a basis. I have been assisted by these writers in interpreting this theory as being applicable not only to the words which describe a system but also, in some cases, to the system itself. Here I suggest is a significant link between philosophy and my interpretation of "how" some things work. Here I see a link between philosophy and systems theory because the philosophy itself must, for me, be appreciated through systems of knowing which necessarily entail systems of words. For philosophy to be useful to me in the untying of knots in my understanding, it must map on to the observations of systems or at any rate the metaphors I use in attempts to make sense of them.

### **Systems within systems: positivism as a system within a larger metaphysical system**

Systems for me consist of interacting information, and "information" here I use in a wide sense which includes everything of which I can be aware. Systems are

contained in bigger systems but, for the purposes of study, boundaries can usefully be identified. Thus, positivism can be seen as a system of knowing within a bigger metaphysical system.

#### A Little About the Personalities Involved:

##### Ayer and Collingwood

Returning to my discussion of positivism and metaphysics, and the personalities involved in the particular argument I have mentioned, I suggest that the story is significant as a piece of history of the communication of ideas. It seems to be an example of a partial misunderstanding, perhaps partly deliberately effected by Collingwood, which led to a symmetrical schism at a contextual level, though not at the content level.

However I do not claim wide knowledge of the historical context so what follows is partly conjecture.

I suggest that the argument gained fervour partly as the result of the following.

##### Ayer

1. Ayer was not a scientist. He arrived at philosophy through classics, and he had never investigated phenomena as a professional scientist. I guess he had studied science only in an elementary form. (There is evidence for this in the first part of his autobiography: *Part of My Life*, Chapter 2.)

2. The members of the Vienna Circle were predominantly physical scientists professionally. Physics was perhaps then regarded generally as being the most hard edged of the sciences and apparently the most likely to

produce reliable generalisations in terms of laws.

3. When Ayer listened to the discussions of the Vienna Circle in German he was able to understand but not to contribute orally.

4. Ayer was young at the time, 22 years old when he first attended meetings of the Vienna Circle, and 26 years when Language Truth and Logic appeared.

5. Ayer found contemporary Oxford philosophers and their philosophy sterile. Many of the philosophers seemed to him to be concerned only with the history of philosophy as opposed to examining anything new. Hence Ayer may have had a not uncommon young man's desire to upset and debunk the older and established philosophers and philosophies. There is further evidence of this in Part My Life, by A.J Ayer.

### Collingwood

1. Collingwood was 47 when Language Truth and Logic appeared, and 51 when his Essay on Metaphysics was published.

2. In addition to his work in philosophy, Collingwood also worked professionally as an historian and archaeologist. Though, like Ayer, initially a classicist, unlike Ayer Collingwood developed his philosophical stance through his work as a practising historian and archaeologist; seeds were probably sown at an early stage by his father who was also an archaeologist.

Collingwood was said by Stephen Toulmin (in his introduction to the 1978 edition of Collingwood's Autobiography) to have been a lone wolf among Oxford philosophers of the 1920's and 30's.

Collingwood's philosophy of Art, according to A. R. Lacey's Dictionary of Philosophy, was said to have been influenced by Croce, but the influence was probably not confined to Collingwood's theories about art alone.

Croce is said, in Runes Dictionary of Philosophy, to have considered all human experience an historical experience, philosophy being the methodology of history. Croce's philosophy, we are told, is one of the greatest attempts at elaboration of pure concepts entirely appropriate to historical experience. Collingwood's metaphysics further suggests this influence though much of it he probably strengthened for himself through his work.

In the light of the foregoing information, which I derived from fairly scant research, I suggest that Collingwood was at the time in question an experienced man who had a breadth of knowledge which included some science, and, most significantly, he had applied his own methods to his own real scientific (in his sense) work as an historian and archaeologist; he had found what worked for him. Ayer on the other hand was young and inexperienced when he wrote Language Truth and Logic. He was forceful, probably outspoken even then, and had a strong characteristic inclination to debunk, which, after all, a philosopher should be prepared to do. I suspect Collingwood was irritated by this precocious young man who was upsetting what (i.e. Oxford philosophy) he himself would have liked to have upset, but in a different way and for different reasons. Because Collingwood's intellectual space was much greater than that of Ayer at that time, with many more levels, I feel sure he realised that both his metaphysics and Ayer's positivism could exist together, the latter within the former. Collingwood must have realised that

his idea of metaphysics was different from that which the logical positivists were trying to eliminate. He must have seen that the arguments were to a large extent incompatible, but nevertheless realised that he could successfully, if to some extent indirectly, refute them, by demonstrating what metaphysics, in his view, really was.

#### At different stages in their working lives

It is significant that Collingwood's statement of metaphysics came at what was more or less the end of his working life, after he had used his tools of thought effectively as far as he was concerned. Ayer's elimination of metaphysics was produced at the beginning of his working life.

#### How I Feel I Have Benefited From Writing This Section

In my work as a teacher I feel I benefit from an awareness of the influence of positivism on me and those with whom I interact at greater and lesser distances.

Much of my action has to be based on unverifiable or only weakly verifiable knowledge. For example I am much concerned with what "happens" in other minds though clearly I have little means of verifying my hunches, some of which are at times as strongly held as matters of what appear to be the most obvious "fact". The lack of verification results from the fact that much of the communication with which I am concerned is either non-verbal, or only partly verbal, because its interpretation is partly affected by the relationship between the communicators and or the context.

There are areas of study such as Kinesics, Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence, play and non play which are

concerned with the communication of information which is wholly or partly non verbal; this communication is none-the-less significant, even though much of it is hardly verifiable in a positivistic sense; likewise positivism is of scant significance to my attempt at the cybernetic explanation of my context through more and less appropriate metaphors and analogues.

The benefits of the legacy of the logical positivists are probably largely of a negative kind in that positivism helped to show some of the things which could not be reliably said in any context. What Collingwood did was in my view probably more difficult and equally, if not more, valuable; it was to provide us with useful tools for revealing knowledge within contexts, i.e. what could be said.

#### Liberation from the myth of totally objective, context independent knowledge

An awareness of a notion of conflict between positivism and metaphysics is still important because positivism still seems to be of considerable influence, in some ways restrictively, over the less hard-edged sciences and those people working in fields, such as social sciences (including education), where there seems to be an almost unconscious desire to emulate physics which is erroneously presumed to be entirely hard-edged and independent of context. In reality, no science can possibly be like that misapprehended physics which seems to be emulated. Collingwood's view illuminates this point and it is at the same time liberating in that it helps us to get away from the static "reliability" of "objective" knowledge. It can be seen to support instead the idea that a system of knowledge flows with time. Hence I suggest that the personal conflict I have tried to discuss, though interesting, is not as important as is the potential of

its legacy.

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## 1. Introduction

### Significant authors and books

I have become interested in paradox through reading:- Watzlawick, Beavin Bavelas and Jackson: "The Pragmatics of Human Communication," to which I shall refer later in more detail in this chapter; Bateson: "Steps to an Ecology of Mind"; and Beer: "Platform for Change".

### Theory of logical types

In efforts to resolve some paradoxes these authors have referred to Bertrand Russell's theory of logical types. This theory, to which I refer later also, has helped me towards a better understanding not only of some linguistic, and pragmatic - in Watzlawick's sense - paradoxes, but also of some misunderstandings of systemic functioning.

### Zeno's paradoxes

I have also been affected by paradoxes of a different sort; these are the paradoxes in space and time of the greek philosopher Zeno of Elea of the fifth century B.C. In these paradoxes reasoning seems to be at variance with experience, and hence they present a not uncommon difficulty of how to relate appearance to reality, or sense to reason. These paradoxes seem to me to lead to confusion which results from inappropriate metaphysics: that is metaphysics in Collingwood's sense of suppositions. Thus this type of paradox provides useful illustration of how a change of metaphysics can provide for a change from misunderstanding to understanding.

## 2. The Importance of Paradox For Me

I summarise the importance of paradox for me, as follows.

i) **Entertaining and Benignly Disturbing**

Paradoxes can be an entertaining as well as a benignly disturbing stimulus to thought.

ii) **Metaphysics**

Some paradoxes repay examination of some of the metaphysics - in Collingwood's sense of suppositions - entailed

iii) **"Knots" in Understanding**

Paradoxes have exposed "knots" in my understanding.

iv) **Metalanguage**

Attempts to resolve some paradoxes have provided illustration of the efficacy of thinking in terms of a metalanguage in order to get outside the particular problem.

v) **Levels and Metalevels in Systems**

Attempts to resolve some paradoxes have provided illustration of the use of thinking about communications and systems in terms of levels, including levels about levels or meta levels.

vi) **Systematic and Systemic Thinking**

It seems to me that misunderstanding of systemic functioning can result from the application of systematic thinking when systemic thinking would be more appropriate, and that this is analogous to misunderstanding which arises from the application of inappropriate thinking in attempts to resolve

paradox.

vii) **Different Types of Thinking**

Some paradoxes are amenable to more than one type of thinking as an approach to their resolution - I have tried to show this in my examples which follow; this illustrates the efficacy of applying different types of thinking - e.g. mathematical, scientific, linguistic or systemic - in approaches towards "knots" in understanding.

viii) **Zeno and Space and Time**

It seems to me that Zeno's paradoxes in space and time have helped me towards a better understanding of space and time.

3. **Some Examples of Paradox**

1. **Paradoxes in language**

i. **Levels of Language**

Paradoxes in language, or paradoxical definitions (semantical antinomies) according to Watzlawick's classification, illustrate the notion of levels of language: a statement can function as a metastatement about another statement and even about itself.

In the example below

The only statement in this  
rectangle is false

the statement in the rectangle is self contradictory and hence to some extent potentially disturbing until it is regarded as a statement functioning at two levels of language; at one level it can be thought of - without considering the meaning - as a straightforward assertion; at another level it can be regarded as a statement about that assertion. This paradox is a group of words which can be seen as functioning at two different levels at the same time; as a result it can be made to contradict itself and hence a paradox arises.

### ii Getting Outside the System

The separation of levels here does not, to my mind, solve the paradox, but it does provide the basis for an explanation as to how it arises. It also illustrates how a misunderstanding of something happening within a system - in this case a self contradictory, and hence closed, system of words - can be resolved by getting outside the system.

### iii. A Third Level

In the explanation I have given, which is my attempt to apply what I have learnt from Watzlawick, Bateson, Beer and Russell, I have referred to two levels at which the statement is functioning. There is, however, as regards my resolution, a third level involved: that is the level at which I wrote about the first and second levels; that level is at the level of what Stafford Beer in Platform for Change refers to as

the level of a metalanguage; in writing about that I could be considered to be functioning at a meta meta level, and clearly I could pursue this ad infinitum though without much profit.

I am convinced it is a useful idea to try to get outside the immediate system, whether it be a system of discourse as in a paradox in language - I feel it is useful to consider groups of words in use as subsystems of a bigger system: language itself - or whether it be a system which is a functioning organisation of people.

### Language and context.

#### **Implied self-containedness**

I suggest there is a deceptive implied self - containedness about many statements in words. This in my view is because in many statements, paradoxical or not, there is potential for a receiver of the statement to be drawn in to thinking that the whole context has been covered.

#### **Inconsequential Language**

It is easy to produce examples of inconsequential language which can help to show that whatever we say or write seldom if ever embraces a whole context. The important philosophical principle of not confusing a description of a thing with the thing itself, which might be a context, is relevant here.

For example: the word "the" on its own says little if anything explicitly, though implicitly there is more to come; "the red" has a bit more meaning, and "the red boat" gives us enough information to have a picture but not enough to tell us anything definite; "the red boat sank" is a complete sentence but it has little sig-

nificance without a larger context.

## II The barber paradox: a paradox in set theory

### **Advantage of Metalanguage**

The importance of context brings me to the barber paradox. In Platform for Change, Stafford Beer uses the barber paradox to illustrate an advantage of moving in to a metalanguage to talk about an example of undecidability which arises in the language we have.

He says that all languages are defective because there are always propositions about the language itself that can not be expressed in the language.

He quotes the barber paradox.

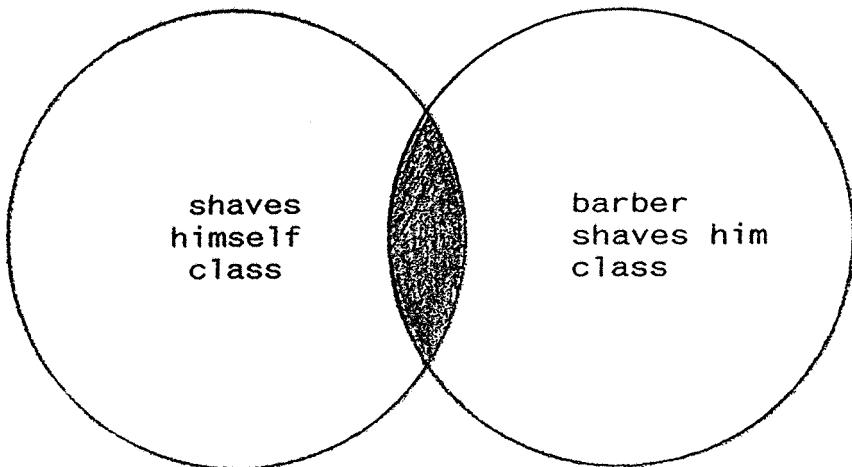
- a) the barber in this town shaves everyone who does not shave himself
- b) who shaves the barber?

Beer then goes on to say that there is no direct answer to the question, and, more particularly, there is no way, using the language we have, of discussing what has gone wrong because the language is in general perfectly all right. You just find, he says, that you can not talk about the barber himself without contradicting yourself. But, he says, we are already managing to discuss the problem and thus we have moved in to a meta language.

- c) if the barber shaves himself, he can not shave himself: if he does not shave himself, he shaves himself.

## From Metalanguage to New Language

A metalanguage, Beer continues, is competent to discuss undecidability in the language; having moved in to a metalanguage we are in a position to construct a new language for talking about the barber. He then refers to the diagram below



### First Language Decreates the Barber

He says that it is evident that the shaded area is the barber. The language we started with, i.e. such language as a, b and c, is so constructed that the two circles are necessarily kept apart; that language actually decreates the barber so no wonder we felt trapped. He emphasises that the second language, i.e. the diagram, is not a metalanguage, but we had to move in to a metalanguage to provide the logical vantage point from which to perceive the nature of undecidability in the first language and to design the second.

### Bertrand Russell's Paradox and Theory of Logical Types

During this section Beer points out that the key thought is about the class of classes that are (or are not) members of themselves. He says that Bertrand Russell was the first to sort this out. Through this work Russell developed his own paradox and theory of logical

types which I discuss in some detail further on in this chapter under the heading Watzlawick on paradox.

### **A Dictionary of Philosophy on the Barber Paradox**

A dictionary of Philosophy, Pan Books, 1979 deals with the barber paradox very swiftly.

It describes it as a paradox in set theory. "Suppose," it says, "that the barber of Seville shaves all the men of Seville, except those who shave themselves. Does the barber shave himself? If he does shave himself, he is not to be shaved by the barber, that is, himself; if he doesn't he should be shaved by the barber. Hence he both does and does not shave himself. So the original supposition is false. Compare Russell's paradox."

#### **Russell's resolution not entirely satisfying, hence some observations**

This paradox seems to me to be more troublesome than my first example about the statement in the rectangle being false. I can see that Russell's theory of logical types provides a resolution but I find it hard to be entirely satisfied with this, as indeed I do with my own offering which follows. (A discussion of Russell's paradox begins on page 130.)

The train of my thinking about the barber paradox is as follows:

#### **Some General Observations About Language**

- a) Use of language is time dependent and thus it is intrinsically a form of change. A change from the level of a statement to a metalevel about that statement can happen without being noticed and, as has been

shown above, a statement can function at two different levels at the same time.

b) Language seems to be able to give an illusion of protracting the present and even of stopping time. When something has been said or written it has permanence.

c) Language seems to be able to give an illusion of encapsulating all of a context within a limited set of words.

**Who shaves the barber? A question at a metalevel, hence a paradox in language?**

**A Question Arises at a Metalevel**

The question: "Who shaves the barber?" arises as a result of the undecidability of the statement about the barber. This question has to be asked at a metalevel as regards the statement: "The barber of Seville shaves all the men of Seville, except those who shave themselves." The question would not arise if the statement about the barber were unequivocally clear; thus it is implicitly a question about the statement; it would not arise if the statement were qualified with a remark like "except it must be made clear that the barber shaves himself; all the other men in Seville who do not shave themselves are shaved by the barber."

**An Answer Arises At A Metalevel; The Key Word is "All"**

Because the question of who shaves the barber is implicitly a question about the statement of the paradox, it can, in my view, only be considered profitably at a metalevel in relation to the statement of the paradox. Hence it can be profitably answered only at a metalevel to the paradox, i.e. from a posi-

tion which takes in to account the self-reflexive nature of the language used, the key word in which is the "all" in "all the men of Seville."

### **Illusion That The Whole Context Has Been Covered**

The question arises as a result of the undecidability which itself results from the lack of necessary information in the statement of the paradox which, nevertheless, gives the illusion that the whole context has been covered. Qualification of the type I have suggested would provide enough of the context for the question to be answered satisfactorily.

### **An Important Principle Illustrated: Questions About Decontextualised Situations**

I suggest that these efforts to resolve the barber paradox illustrate a useful principle which is that of the importance of being wary of questions about decontextualised or extra contextual situations. For example, I am sometimes asked by parents which public school I think is the best; in my replies I try to point out that I feel we should think in terms of which school would be best for a particular child.

### **III Zeno's paradox about Achilles and the tortoise**

I feel that my concepts of space and time have been refined by my looking at Zeno's paradox about Achilles and the tortoise.

#### **Importance**

The importance of this paradox lies not in deciding whether or not Achilles overtakes the tortoise - clearly he must - but rather in exposing the catch in Zeno's argument.

## **Understanding Restricted by Language**

This paradox in my view also provides an example of how people's understanding and metaphysics in terms of suppositions can be restricted by the language that they have. There is circularity here: the language can affect the suppositions; the suppositions can restrict the understanding; the understanding can affect the language, and the language can carry suppositions.

### **L. Hogben on Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise.**

This paradox is clearly stated by L. Hogben in Mathematics for the Million, first published in 1936, page 16, from which I quote the following:

"Achilles runs a race with the tortoise. He runs ten times as fast as the tortoise. The tortoise has 100 yards' start. Now, says Zeno, Achilles runs 100 yards and reaches the place where the tortoise started. Meanwhile the tortoise has gone a tenth as far as Achilles, and is therefore 10 yards ahead of Achilles. Achilles runs this ten yards. Meanwhile the tortoise has run a tenth as far as Achilles, and is therefore one yard in front of him. Achilles runs this yard. Meanwhile the tortoise has run a tenth of a yard and is therefore a tenth of a yard in front of Achilles. Achilles runs this tenth of a yard. Meanwhile the tortoise goes a tenth of a tenth of a yard. He is now a hundredth of yard in front of Achilles. When Achilles has caught up this hundredth of a yard, the tortoise is a thousandth of yard in front. So, argued Zeno, Achilles is always getting nearer the tortoise, but can never quite catch him up."

### **Where is the Catch?**

Hogben points out that Zeno and all those who argued with him recognised that Achilles really did get past the tortoise; what troubled them was: where is

the catch?

### **Hogben's Explanation: the Greeks and Division**

Below I paraphrase Hogben's explanation of some of the difficulty the ancient Greeks had with division.

#### **The Greeks and Division.**

The Greeks found any problem involving division very much more difficult than a problem involving multiplication. They had no way of doing division to any order of accuracy, because they relied for calculation on the mechanical aid of the counting frame or abacus. They could not do sums on paper. The Greek mathematician was thus unable to see some things which we can see without even considering whether we can see it or not. If we go on piling up bigger and bigger quantities, the pile goes on growing more rapidly without any end as long as we go on adding more. If we can go on adding larger and larger quantities without coming to a stop, it seemed to Zeno's contemporaries that we ought to be able to go on adding smaller and still smaller quantities indefinitely without reaching a limit. They thought that in one case the pile goes on for ever, growing more rapidly, and in the other it goes on for ever, growing more slowly. There was nothing in their number language to suggest that when the engine slows beyond a certain point, it chokes off.

Expressing in numbers the distance which the tortoise traverses at different stages of the race after Achilles starts: it moves: 10 yards in stage 1, 1 yard in stage 2,  $1/10$  of yard in stage 3,  $1/100$  yard in stage 4 etc. If we had a number language like the Greeks and Romans, or the Hebrews, all of whom used letters of the alphabet, we might write the total of all the distances the tortoise ran before Achilles

caught him up, as below:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} x & + & I & + & \underline{I} & + & \underline{I} \\ & & & & x & & c \\ & & & & & & M \end{array} \text{ and so on.}$$

(Roman numerals have been used because they are more familiar, though, according to Hogben, the Romans did not actually have the convenient method of representing proper fractions used above for illustrative purposes). The important point seems to me to be that even if the Greeks had had such a system they still would not have had the advantage of the clear clue to the paradox which the decimal system provides.

Using Roman numerals there is nothing to suggest how the distances at each stage of the race are connected with one another. Today we have a number vocabulary which makes this relation perfectly evident, when we write it down as:

$$10 + 1 + \frac{1}{10} + \frac{1}{100} + \frac{1}{1000} + \frac{1}{10000} + \frac{1}{100000} + \frac{1}{1000000}$$

and so on.

using decimal fractions this becomes:

$$10 + 1 + 0.1 + 0.01 + 0.001 + 0.0001$$

$$+ 0.00001 + 0.000001 \quad \text{and so on.}$$

This can be written more simply as:

$$11.111111$$

or even more simply as:

$$11.1$$

0.1 corresponds with the fraction  $1/9$ , so, the longer the sum,

0.1 + 0.01 + 0.001    etc.

becomes, the nearer it gets to  $1/9$ , and it never grows bigger than  $1/9$ . Therefore the total of all the yards the tortoise moves until there is no distance between himself and Achilles makes up just  $11\frac{1}{9}$  yards, and no more.

### **Other Solutions.**

Hogben offers two other solutions to the paradox: a travel graph on page 89 and an algebraic solution on page 308. However, the important point is not to show that Achilles overtakes the tortoise - we all know he must - but to show how our language, including mathematical language, can affect our thinking and understanding to such an extent that finding the catch in the paradox can present difficulties.

### **My Own Attempt at an Explanation in Terms of Ordinary Language.**

It seems plausible to me to think in terms of the mechanics of Achilles's running, and suggest that his motion is brought about by ultimately discontinuous processes as a result of some of the physiological, neurological and metabolic components of the activity requiring discrete periods of time of finite lengths. Hence there is a limit to how slowly someone can run, and also there is a minimum distance any particular individual can run; this would also apply to the tortoise but the proportions would be different. Time in each case is a function of these physiological changes, so the proposed infinite regression and hence infinite division of time, matching blocks of Achilles's time to the tortoise's time is not feasible; physiology can not work like that because it consists of phenomena which

arise as a result of the interactions of entities such as waves and particles which have finite sizes, and which hence require finite periods of time to interact.

### Watzlawick on Paradox

#### **Definition**

In the *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, Watzlawick, Beavin, Bavelas and Jackson devote three chapters to paradox, initially defining paradox as a contradiction that follows correct deduction from consistent premises. This, they say, allows the exclusion of false paradoxes that are based on concealed error in reasoning or some fallacy built into the argument, although the division of paradoxes into real and false ones is relative. Contemporary consistent premises are not unlikely to become fallacies in the future. For example Zeno's paradox was a true paradox until it was discovered that infinite converging series have a finite limit, as demonstrated by Hogben with simple arithmetic.

#### **Revision of Conceptual Schemes**

Watzlawick then quotes Quine on the revision of conceptual schemes, p188: "Revision of a conceptual scheme is not unprecedented. It happens in a small way with each advance in science, and it happens in a big way with the big advances, such as the Copernican revolution and the shift from Newtonian mechanics to Einstein's theory of relativity. We can hope in time even to get used to the biggest such changes...."

I suggest that this idea of revision of conceptual schemes is related to metaphysics in my "old" and "new" sense. It seems to be about "new" sense suppositions being changed by "old" sense speculation.

### **Three types of paradox**

Watzlawick then explains three types of paradox pointing out that the word "antinomy" is sometimes used interchangeably with "paradox," but that most authors limit its use to paradoxes arising in formalised systems such as logic and mathematics.

#### **1. Antinomies**

These constitute Watzlawick's first type of paradox. According to Quine, we are told, an antinomy "produces a self contradiction by accepted ways of reasoning." Stegmuller defines an antinomy as a statement that is both contradictory and provable - every antinomy is a logical contradiction, but not every logical contradiction is an antinomy.

#### **2. Semantical Antinomies or Paradoxical Definitions**

A second class of paradoxes arises out of some hidden inconsistencies in the level structure of thought. These are often referred to as semantical antinomies or paradoxical definitions. Linguistic paradoxes are included here.

#### **3. Pragmatic Paradoxes**

A third group of paradoxes arises in ongoing interactions. Where they determine behaviour, Watzlawick calls these pragmatic paradoxes. He divides them into paradoxical injunctions and paradoxical predictions.

#### **Summary**

To summarise, according to Watzlawick, there are three types of paradox:-

1. logico-mathematical paradoxes (antinomies)
2. paradoxical definitions (semantical antinomies)
3. pragmatic paradoxes (paradoxical injunctions and paradoxical predictions)

### **Three Main Areas of Communication**

The three types correspond to the three main areas of the theory of human communication: logical syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

#### **Logico-mathematical Paradoxes and the Theory of Logical Types.**

##### **Russell's paradox**

The most famous paradox of this group is about "the class of all classes which are not members of themselves." I summarise and discuss this, Russell's paradox, below.

##### **Classes**

A class is the totality of all objects having a certain property. All cats, past present and future comprise the class of cats. All other objects in the universe can be considered the class of non-cats. Any statement purporting that an object belongs to both these classes would be a simple contradiction, for nothing can be a cat and not a cat at the same time.

##### **Classes Can Be Members of Themselves**

Stepping one logical level higher it can be seen that classes can be members of themselves or not. The class of all concepts is itself a concept, whereas the class of cats is not itself a cat. At this second

level the universe is again divided in to two classes, those which are members of themselves and those which are not. Any statement purporting that one of these classes is and is not a member of itself would amount to a simple contradiction.

### **The Class of Classes Which Are Not Members of Themselves**

However, moving to the next logical level, all classes that are members of themselves can be united in to one class, called M, and all classes that are not members of themselves can be united into class N. The question whether class N is or is not a member of itself leads to Russell's paradox. The division of the universe in to self-membership and non-self membership classes is exhaustive. Therefore, if class N is a member of itself it is not a member of itself, because N is the class of classes which are not members of themselves. If N is not a member of itself, then it satisfies the condition of self membership: it is a member of itself because it is not a member of itself. This is a true antinomy because the paradoxical outcome is based on rigorous logical deduction and not on violation of the laws of logic. Unless there is a hidden fallacy in the whole notion of class membership, the logical conclusion is inescapable that class N is a member of itself if and only if it is not a member of itself and vice versa.

### **A Fallacy Involved**

There is a fallacy involved. It was made apparent by Bertrand Russell through the introduction of his theory of logical types. This theory postulates the principle that whatever involves all of a collection must not be one of the collection. The Russellian paradox is therefore due to a confusion of logical

types, or levels. A class is of a higher type than its members; to postulate it, it is necessary to go to one level up in the hierarchy of types. To say that the class of all concepts is itself a concept is not false, but meaningless. If the statement were simply false, then its negation would have to be true, which is clearly not the case.

### **Ayer on the Theory of Logical Types**

In his *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* A. J. Ayer refers to the theory of logical types as having been devised by Russell to deal with an antinomy which held up the progress of *Principia Mathematica* and led Gottlob Frege (who is described in *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (Pan) as the founding father of modern mathematical logic, philosophy of mathematics, and philosophy of language) to say, when Russell communicated to him, that the foundations of mathematics had crumbled. Ayer concisely describes the paradox as follows.

"The antinomy arises out of the natural assumption that to every property there correspond the two classes of those objects that possess the property and those that lack it. But now consider the property, (applicable) to classes, of not belonging to itself. At first sight this seems a genuine property. For example the class of countable objects is itself countable; the class of men is not itself a man. But what of the class of classes which are not members of themselves? If it is a member of itself, it is not; and if it is not, it is."

### **My suggestions**

I have included this example because the distinction between the notion of countable objects and the notion of a man clearly demonstrates, in my view, a difference between the category of those classes which can be members of themselves and the category of those

classes which cannot. I suggest that the active perception involved in making sense of the appearance of a man is quite different from the perception and other cerebral activity involved in arriving at the class of countable objects. The class of men would seem to form a natural concept automatically, whereas the class of countable objects would seem to require to be thought about to be formed. Thus, the class of countable objects is dependent on a conscious mental activity, counting, just as the class of classes is dependent on a conscious mental activity, classifying. Conscious mental activities can have that activity turned upon themselves. Other such classes are: the class of listable objects, describable objects, criticizable objects, discussible objects, rejectable, acceptable, and comprehensible objects etc. A uniting common factor in all these would seem to be the voluntary mental actions which, because they are voluntary, can be turned upon themselves.

There is thus for me a clear distinction between the way in which classes which are members of themselves are formed, and the way in which classes which are not members of themselves are formed. The classes which are members of themselves have to be thought about or at any rate have something done to them consciously to be formed whereas the classes of things which are not members of themselves do not. A cow is a cow because we call it a cow; another cow, which I have not yet seen, will still immediately be a cow to me and be called a cow when I see it, without my thinking about it any further. Hence the classes of things which are not members of themselves - at this stage I am not considering the possible membership here of the class of classes which are not members of themselves - contain things like cows, boats, islands, raindrops, gorse bushes and all the other things I can see now as I look out of my window, across the Solent, at the Isle

of Wight. The hypothetical class of classes which are not members of themselves is clearly not a member of this class because it has to be thought about in a different way to exist. However, such is the nature of our language that we can create and talk about a class of classes which are not members of themselves, and further we can then ask whether or not that class is a member of itself. I am not attempting here to decide whether or not it is a member of itself. The theory of logical types goes far enough for me in demonstrating how, through the existence of different logical levels, the paradox arises. All I am trying to show is the difference between the classes of things which are not members of themselves and this particular linguistically contrived class. As far as the way this class is formed is concerned, i.e. being consciously worked at, it has, for me, more similarity with the classes of things which are members of themselves.

In the interests of clarity and my own mental stability I shall now let this matter rest, temporarily, though I must point out that I regard it as having, for me, more than a little significance to problems in and about philosophy as well as matters more practical.

Elsewhere I refer to a book called 'Steps to an Ecology of Mind,' by Gregory Bateson, in which the author deals with the importance of the theory of Logical Types in relation to behaviour with particular reference to communication and learning theory. Bateson makes what seems to me to be an important distinction between generalised behaviour, at one logical level, and particular examples of such behaviour at a lower logical level. An example of generalised behaviour might be inquisitiveness; a particular example might be a child's inquisitiveness regarding what is in the cake tin.

It seems to me that adults often make the error of assuming they can modify a child's generalised behaviour by attending to a few particular examples of it. For example an adult might think that a child should cease being generally inquisitive after being told off for looking in the biscuit tin. The adult might then become cross when she or he finds the child trying the door of the refrigerator. The child might have learnt not to investigate the biscuit tin in particular, but it has not thus induced a general rule that all investigation must cease; clearly such generally inquisitive behaviour may well be of survival value and hence understandably not be easily eradicated.

### Returning to Watzlawick

Returning to Watzlawick we find a clear and straight forward resolution. "Concept" on the lower (member) level and "concept" on the next higher (class) level are not the same thing, we are told, but using the same name forms a linguistic illusion of identity. Inconsistencies of language rather than of logic are the root of the evil.

While I find Watzlawick's, analysis of paradox helpful, I find this last sentence quite difficult because I do not see that in dealing with Russell's paradox in terms of logic it is actually possible to get away from the influence of language; for me the logic must come out of language. I would ask whether meaning can actually be taken right out of logic. However, I hope my earlier remarks provide an illustration for this point which Watzlawick makes concisely and which, to me, in the light of my last point, provides a clear link between his logico-mathematical paradoxes (antinomies) and his paradoxical definitions (semantical antinomies).

### Semantical Antinomies

A famous semantical antinomy, Watzlawick continues, is that of the man who says of himself "I am lying," (which is true only if it is not true). Here, we are told the theory of logical types cannot eliminate the antinomy because words or combinations of words do not have a logical type hierarchy, but a theory of levels of language has been developed, mainly by Carnap and Tarski. This postulates that at the lowest level of language statements are made about objects. This is the object language. Statements about this language, however, must be made in a metalanguage. A meta metalanguage must be used to make statements about the metalanguage, and so forth in a theoretically infinite regress. The semantical antinomy of the liar contains two statements. One is on the object level, the other is on the metalevel and says something about the one on the object level. It says it is not true. This is very similar to my self-contradictory statement in the rectangle, and the same explanation, as given here, applies.

### Pragmatic Paradoxes

Watzlawick's third category is that of Pragmatic paradoxes which, I suggest, make up the most important type of which to be aware in an enquiry in to how things do and do not work.

First Watzlawick lists the essential ingredients of pragmatic paradox:-

1. A strong complementary relationship (e.g. officer and subordinate).
2. Within the frame an injunction is given that must be obeyed but must be disobeyed to be obeyed.

3. The person in the one-down position in this relationship is unable to step outside the frame and thus dissolve the paradox by commenting on it, that is, metacommunicating about it.

He then suggests that pragmatic paradoxes, especially paradoxical injunctions, are far more frequent than one would be inclined to believe. He gives several examples. His third one on page 199 seems to me to be particularly significant in relation to communications between teachers and pupils. It is suggested that this type is the most frequent form in which paradox enters in to the pragmatics of human communication.

#### "Be spontaneous" paradox

The type in question is that initiated through an injunction demanding specific behaviour, which by its very nature can only be spontaneous. The prototype of this message is "Be spontaneous". This injunction entails an untenable position because to comply one would have to be spontaneous within a frame of compliance which is necessarily one of non-spontaneity. What comes to my mind here are teachers' and other adults' requests that children should change their attitudes. Any child's attitude might change as a result of internal or external factors, but it would seem unlikely if not impossible, for the child to change his or her attitude intentionally and immediately. The point seems to me to be that, in some cases at any rate, in order to change one's own attitude, one has to want to do so, and wanting to do so requires a changed attitude. This whole question of how attitudes can and can not be changed (leaving aside the morality of trying to do it) and how long it takes, seems to me a crucial one for

anyone involved in teaching and, indeed, anyone involved in human interactive systems. Desired changes in behaviour are in some cases achieved by the impositions of constraints which create long term tensions, but the second order state of a change of attitude, which might be seen as a means of securing a longer term change in first order behaviour, is a very much more difficult thing to bring about. This is also relevant to disagreements between adults and the metaphysics there of.

I suggest that this particular piece of theory is relevant to human interaction generally, and for me it has particular significance in relation to my interacting with children in attempts to educate, and my interacting with adults, about educating. I shall offer some examples of the sort of areas to which I feel this relevant in sections on actuality in Part IV. I do not pretend to have a clear theory worked out, but I suggest that some of the reasons why so often the obvious theory does not work are enmeshed in more complex phenomena which can profitably be treated with attention to metaphysics and systemic thinking. I suggest that relevant examples of difficulties of effecting change in human systems occurred in my attempts to change the behaviour of staff, headmasters and children in the school in regard to the Evangelical issue, Discipline, Academic standards, and the conflict over the pre-prep, all of which I describe in Part IV, Issues and experiences.

### **Double bind theory**

After several examples of pragmatic paradox, Watzlawick refers on p.211 to the Double Bind Theory. He says that the effects of paradox in human interaction were first described by Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland in a paper entitled "Towards a Theory of

*Schizophrenia*" (1956). The ingredients of a double bind are fully enumerated by Watzlawick on pages 212-217, but, as it is interesting and relevant I summarise them here

1. Two or more persons are involved in a relationship.
2. In such a relationship a message is given which is so structured that
  - a) it asserts something,
  - b) it asserts something about its own assertion
  - c) these two assertions are mutually exclusive
3. The recipient of the message is prevented from stepping outside the frame set by the message, either by meta-communicating (commenting) about it or withdrawing.

#### **We Are All Exposed To Double Binds Occasionally**

Watzlawick points out that the world we live in is far from logical and that we all have been exposed occasionally in isolated and spurious ways to double binds, yet most of us manage to preserve our sanity. A different situation obtains when the exposure to double bind is long lasting and gradually becomes a habitual expectation. If this occurs in childhood it is particularly significant since all children are inclined to conclude that what happens to them happens everywhere.

#### **Possible Effects of Double Bind**

Watzlawick lists some behavioural effects likely to be produced by double binds, on p.217, initially pointing out that in any communicational sequence every exchange of messages narrows down the number of pos-

sible next moves. (I am not sure this is true in all contexts, but it is an idea which is worth bearing in mind.)

#### Possible effects:-

1. a conclusion by the subject of the double bind that he or she is overlooking vital clues and hence an obsession with finding the clues is formed, leading away from relevant issues eventually;
2. or, compliance with any and all injunctions with complete literalness and an overt abstaining from any independent thinking,
3. or, withdrawal from human involvement or hyperactive behaviour that is so intense and sustained that most incoming messages are thereby drowned out.

#### Importance for Teachers

I suggest that some of these states are quite commonly achieved by ordinary people (children particularly) and that the theory merits more detailed attention by those who are normally concerned with children.

It would also seem of value to examine, or at any rate to be aware of, the possibilities of such states being brought about by an individual's (particularly a child's) relationship with more than one person.

A classic example in my experience is that of the child whose affectionate parents ask towards the end of the holidays if the child is looking forward to returning to (boarding) school. The child can find him or herself in a quandary: should she or he please and possibly displease the parents by saying "Yes" or should

she or he displease or please them by saying "No".

The difficulties children have in reconciling the expectations of their peers and those of adults also spring to mind. However, I would say we all suffer similar conditions and that we are all capable, to greater and lesser extents, of being trapped in double binds of greater and lesser intensity. Bateson and Watzlawick may or may not have something of value to say for the study of schizophrenia, but I am sure the double bind theory has value in it for all those concerned with human interaction.

CHAPTER 11.

Time p.168

Communal time and individual time.

Clocks.

No such individual thing as time.

Some speculations on time. p.169

Various clocks.

My sensation of a passage of time.

Further reflection.

Time in relation to detention as a punishment.

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We all seem to need more time.

Pressures related to perceptions.

Some staff seem to be overworking in order to draw attention to themselves, Aug 1986.

Some thoughts about the pressures on the staff, July 1991. p.175

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Conclusion.

Communal and individual time

Zeno's paradox about Achilles and the tortoise stimulated my interest in the idea of time.

I had thought of Achilles's time as being a function of how, and hence when, things happen in Achilles. The tortoise's time seemed to be a function of how and when things happen in the tortoise. I began to think about how and when things physiological and psychological happen in people. As a schoolmaster involved in policy making, I felt I should try to develop a more sensitive awareness to how time differed from individual to individual. It seemed to me to be important to be aware that I was helping to prescribe a communal time: the organization's time; this needed to accomodate a range of individuals' times: individuals' functioning times. I began to speculate that each individual contained a range of physiological and psychological clocks which was probably peculiar to that individual.

Clocks

By the word clock I meant some characteristic which changed; the rate of change was not necessarily uniform. Examples would include: metabolic rates, pulse rates, growth rates, the rate at which we can process information and learn different skills, and the rates at which we mature and age.

No such thing as time by itself

I began to think that there was no such thing as time by itself, and that we had a sense of time only because things, including ourselves, changed.

If nothing changed there would be no time; but, if nothing changed, then I would not exist to see that nothing changed.

To observe change I have to exist, and to exist I have to be changing, and to observe change I have to be changing.

Because change can only be observed by a changing observer, the observation of change is likely to be affected by, and hence be to some extent peculiar to, that observer.

In August 1986 I recorded some of my thoughts about time under the heading: Some speculations on time.

#### Some Speculations on Time

August 1986

#### Various clocks

Each individual contains a set of various clocks, each of which can run at varying rates within the same individual; the sets of clocks can vary as regards the ranges of their rates from individual to individual. The rate of a particular clock within an individual can vary in relation to the state of the psychological space at the time.

Time is a function of change; hence, time is inseparable from space; time and space for us are inevitably mind dependent. In order to measure and indicate time, clocks are made to have uniform periods.

A clock is something which changes.

Time may be infinitely divisible, but no clock is capable of the infinite division of time.

The extent to which time is divisible is dependent upon the size of the frequency of oscillation of the clock which has the greatest frequency.

A system which demonstrates periodic change, though its period need not be of consistently uniform size, can be regarded as a form of "clock": hence the expression "biological clock".

Time is peculiar to particular "clocks" and can be divided in peculiar ways according to the ranges of periods of particular "clocks".

#### My sensation of a passage of time

I have a sensation of a passage of time as a result of my perception of change; my impression is that time does not always pass at a uniform rate.

When I write, time seems to pass quickly.

If I find myself in a situation in which I have to wait for something or someone, I can become bored when little is changing - in other words happening - around me, and little is happening in my mind. But, I can also be bored when much is happening around me that does not occupy my mind; I have had this experience sitting through a boring lecture which I would much rather have not attended; in such cases my lack of interest has resulted in little change in my mind, so time has seemed to pass slowly. The apparent speed of the passage of time to me seems to be a function of the rate of change in me. It may be that when I feel anxious and I am waiting for something to happen to relieve my anxiety, time seems to pass slowly because the anxiety captures my mind and thus slows down the rate of change within it; in such a situation it may be that my mind is fettered by concern about one or a very

few basic ideas which contain little change; hence time seems to pass slowly.

However, if I anxiously wait for something and at the same time I think through many reasons why it has not happened, then time can seem to pass quickly, perhaps because there is more change occurring in my mind.

In a similar way, if I become anxious about getting something done in time before something else is due to happen, then time seems to pass quickly, perhaps because my mind is occupied with all that I am trying to do, which constitutes a lot of change, before the deadline.

### Further reflection

With further reflection, however, it seems that at one and the same time, time can appear to go quickly in some senses and slowly in others. This may be because my mind is capable of operating in more than one psychological space at any given time. For example: if I have to drive somewhere and have a late start and I keep looking at the clock in the car, time appears to go slowly according to the clock because its change is slow in relation to its expected rate of change caused by my anxiety; but, my progress along the road provides constant change, even if, as is the case, I do not drive very fast, and hence, in respect of this, time seems to go quicker.

It may be that in relation to my journey along the road, time can seem to pass even quicker if my actual progress does not match up to my expected or desired progress, which occupies a third psychological space, this may be partly the result of the extra change involved in my thoughts moving from the actual progress space to the desired progress space.

### Time in relation to detention as a punishment

The point about the rate of change within a mind and the apparent rate of the passage of time became evident when I heard that some children in the school had unofficially been asked about detention as a form of punishment. They had apparently said that they did not mind detention provided they were given something to do, such as to write out lines; what they did object to was having nothing at all to do, because the time dragged so. I have not suggested that we adopt such a policy for detention because I sense there would be considerable objection on the ground that it was undesirable for children to spend time doing nothing by our design. However, I feel such a punishment could usefully be considered for cases of extreme or persistent offenders, so I may well yet propose it.

### We seem to differ

Each of us seems to be at least slightly different from each of the rest. In the unstructured course of events our clocks seem to adapt, partially, one to another. Hence, when devising a timetable for an organisation there is need to accommodate a range of individual differences. I suggest this is sometimes overlooked by those who are quick, energetic and industrious who tend to be the type who gain promotion to policy making levels.

### Information inputs

According to C.H. Waddington in Tools for Thought, each of us can cope with up to about seven different information inputs at any one time.

As stated, Waddington's idea seems to imply the occupation of one immediate psychological space,

whereas it seems that we are capable of occupying more than one at a time.

For example, like many others of whom I know, I am apt to read while at the same time to be not only thinking about something completely different and quite irrelevant, but also to be listening to music.

It also seems to be the case that my immediate psychological space is capable of receiving input from other psychological spaces of mine, as well as from outside. Memory probably plays a large part in this.

I had a strange experience, which seemed to illustrate the combination of memory and psychological spaces, when I was buying a tractor for the school. The vendor, whom I knew well, told me the price of the machine, and I wrote out one of my own cheques there and then that he might then deliver as soon as possible. He took the cheque without looking at it, and I left to go to the bank to draw some cash. When I was writing the second cheque for the cash, I became aware that I had not written the cheque for the tractor correctly; I was convinced I had not written the same amount in figures as I had in words; I returned to the vendor of the tractor to find that this was the case - he had not noticed it - and hence to put the matter right. The experience seemed strange because I had made a mistake on the first cheque, apparently without noticing it in my immediate psychological space, but I had nevertheless remembered it, and indeed I recalled it when writing out the next cheque.

#### **Waddington's Idea Is Perhaps Not Definitive**

Waddington's idea, I suggest, points us in the right direction, but I am not sure we should accept it

as definitive. The duration of the "any one time" presents me with difficulty, particularly in the light of my remarks about the divisibility of time. If the "any one time" varies from individual to individual, then a considerable discrepancy between individuals' mental capacities - not necessarily their potentials, as I point out in my section on metaphysics - would exist. From experience there seems to be discrepancy, and so it is in my view best to be aware of this when devising and administrating organisations. An individual who has the ability to operate quickly in more than one space, and to move quickly from space to space, may frequently get the better of a slower operator who might actually be potentially more effective.

#### We all seem to need more time

It seems a comonly held view in the school that all of the staff need more time than they have to get through their work.

If we accept that as individuals we require different amounts of time, then if all our time is filled according to a common standard then many of us are not going to be able to cope with enough work well enough to keep us adequately contented. Further, if we accept that there is an accelerating increase in the variety of interactions between us and the children, the filling of our time must reduce our chances of keeping up with change adequately.

#### **Pressures related to perceptions**

The pressures which time exerts upon us as individuals are, nevertheless, to a large extent the result of or our perceptions of what we feel we ought to be doing. Important questions to consider seem to

be:-

- i) How can we organise better so that we can get things done more efficiently and with less anxiety?
- ii) If there are areas where we fail to be more efficient whatever we try to do, how, if we can, can we feel better about not achieving the standards we would like to achieve?

Some staff seem to be overworking in order to draw attention to themselves

August 1986

There are some staff who are, in my view, actually overworking to their and the children's detriment - who seem to want to impress others by how hard they work. There are also some who seem to like to shame others for not doing enough. The very active staff are in all cases relatively young - under thirty - and unmarried, and they seem to be partly motivated by a reaction against the older, more established teachers, most of whom have family commitments. More than once members of the very active group have asked me to suggest to the headmaster and governors that a minimum requirement of work be defined for each member of staff. Reluctantly I have done this, but wisely in my view, it has been rejected.

Some Thought About the Pressures on the Staff July 1991

In the five years since I wrote "Some speculations on time" considerable change has occurred.

- i) Members of the vociferous energetic group have either left or eased back and quietened down, mainly it would seem as a result of getting married and starting families.

ii) The relatively new, younger members of staff of today do not seem to contain a similar vociferous energetic group; in fact they seem much the reverse and keen to avoid extra commitments in the school.

iii) There is still much concern about the pressures on the staff. If this was justifiable five years ago - my feeling is that it was - then it is more so now because more subjects and activities have entered the curriculum. For example, on full working days: Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, there are now eight lessons, instead of seven, in order to accommodate extra lessons of science, drama and craft/design/technology; further, in the summer term the emphases placed on swimming and tennis have increased to such an extent that they now compete with the major summer games: cricket and rounders, with detrimental effect upon these.

### The extra lessons

The extra lessons have been introduced to conform with the requirements of the National Curriculum and G.C.S.E., the Common Entrance Exam having been modified in relation to these national innovations.

My view of this in the present state of flux is that we should aim to incorporate the attainment targets but not all the documentation of the National Curriculum in to our curriculum - this we are doing - and at the same time we should aim to show that we are achieving more than the National Curriculum requires academically, in order to maintain clear identity, particularly in the eyes of the parents of our increasing proportion of day children.

As regards the time allotment per subject, I sug-

gest we look carefully at the number of subjects which can sensibly be studied by a child at any one given time and, if necessary, be prepared to stray from the National Curriculum, if common sense dictates; there seems to be more thinking to be done at the level of national policy making. Some preparatory school headmasters of whom I know seem more prepared than ours to follow their own thinking inspite of the National Curriculum; I sense that our headmaster and assistant headmaster do not have the confidence to formulate and publicly justify a policy somewhat at variance with that of the National Curriculum, even though there seem sufficient reasons - for example Latin though not a requirement of the National Curriculum is still expected though not obligatory in Common Entrance and requires at least four periods per week to make it worthwhile - for doing so.

The question of the time allotment per subject or activity, along with academic standards generally, I intend to look at in more detail when I have completed this thesis and taken my work on discipline a bit further.

### Conclusion July 1991

#### **Still Much Concern**

There is still concern about increasing pressures on staff time and apparent inefficient use of time. There is a strong feeling that the headmaster has not got enough control over what is happening; it seems he has not got the confidence to be assertive. Many staff, young and old, have asked me to take a lead in facilitating our doing something about it.

I would be keen to try to tackle these concerns but I realise it is a large task and I still need to

feel I have gained further confidence from the headmaster and the staff.

Now that I have resumed my work on discipline and behaviour, not only with the headmaster's support but also in response to a need initially identified by him, I prefer to try to make more progress in this area before moving on to tackle something else. For the first time I am beginning to offer to the staff some of the theory and language I have acquired through my study; it seems that these have been adopted in part at any rate, and that it is agreed that we have already made useful progress as regards discipline. However I feel more progress needs to be evident before I take on another issue.

CHAPTER 12.

Personal theory and a concern with  
Cartesian dualism p.180

The article p.180

Attempts at resolutions p.190

Philosophy p.200

Three difficulties.

Information systems and levels of knowing.

Words and logical levels.

Theory of logical types.

Philosophy and systems theory.

Conclusions p.202

An attempt to apply some personal (philosophical) theory to a contemporary problem.

On 22.4.1988 the following article by D. Bakhurst and J. Dancy appeared in the Times Higher Education Supplement. Having tried to state part of my present personal philosophical theory, it seems valuable to apply this in an attempt to resolve some of the problems raised.

#### THE DUALIST STRAITJACKET

1. Philosophy in Britain is in disarray in two ways. First, the discipline is ineptly struggling to respond to the fact that with the ever worsening financial climate in British higher education, it has become an endangered species. Second, in addition to this familiar external threat, there are also signs of a growing intellectual dissension emerging in our philosophical tradition.
2. Philosophy, it seems, is not only beleaguered from without, it is also sick within. We think that these two factors are joint effects of a single cause: the malign but covert influence of Descartes. In particular, we believe that it is the grip of the Cartesian conception of the self on our philosophy which is responsible both for the present malaise of the discipline and for its incompetence in defending itself from political assault.
3. The role played by Cartesianism in the philosophical tradition can be compared to that of a dominant political ideology. First, it controls

what are conceived as possible alternatives, so that its radical opponents are marginalized, appearing to advocate positions which are extravagant or even lunatic. Second, it contains hidden defence mechanisms which fragment the opposition, making it impossible for its different assailants to form a common front. In this way, the Cartesian controls all orthodox positions in Anglo-American philosophy, be it philosophy of mind, of nature, of ethics, or of politics.

4. Cartesianism achieves its dominance through the power of its conception of the self. Indeed, to talk about "the self" is already to talk in Cartesian terms, for philosophers usually employ the term to refer (in the first instance) not to "human beings" or "persons", but to a distinctly philosophical entity, conceived as a centre of consciousness. In this they follow Descartes' idea that selves are primarily subjects of thought.
5. A Cartesian self has three distinctive properties which issue from the Cartesian's understanding of what it takes to be a subject of thought. First, the Cartesian self is self-sufficient: each is essentially independent of all others. What it is can, indeed must be explained without reference to other selves. Second, it is ready-made since, for the Cartesian, consciousness does not admit of degrees, the self must spring into being with the essential equipment for thought already intact. A Cartesian self cannot develop the capacity to think. Third, the Cartesian self is self-contained: it can function in complete independence of the material world. It inhabits its own mental world, in which it lives an independent mental life.

6. Exactly how does Cartesianism control the positions its opponents are allowed to occupy? Take the philosophy of mind. The cutting edge of Cartesianism here, as elsewhere, is a radical distinction between mind and matter. By insisting that the properties of selves are totally unlike properties of material things, the Cartesian makes it hard to believe that a material thing could be a mind. Thus he arrives at his famous dualism: no one thing can be both a material and a thinking thing.
7. Now, those who wish to deny this dualism are compelled to hold that material things can think. Yet the anti-Cartesian, if he is to frame his theory at all, seems compelled to play by the Cartesian's rules. He must accept Cartesian rules. He must accept Cartesian concepts of the self and of matter, and argue that, despite appearances, the capacities the Cartesian attributes to the self can be reduced, without remainder to the operations of a material thing. Not surprisingly he has an uphill struggle. The Cartesian lies in wait for him to smuggle into his theory some property, like the power of representation, which it seems simply impossible for a material system to possess.
8. So, far from constituting a radial alternative, the reductionist strategy gains its very intelligibility from the polarities of the Cartesian framework, a framework in which it cannot but be false.
9. In fact, the anti-dualist position which stands most chance of being true, by the Cartesian's lights is Berkeley's attempt to collapse the dis-

inction between mind and matter the other way and jettison the concept of matter altogether. Berkeley's views, however, are even more counter-intuitive than Cartesianism! Thus the Cartesian arranges things so his opponents' positions only serve to make his own more attractive. "To oppose me," he says, "you can adopt either a position which is obviously false or which is obviously mad. Take your pick."

10. The Cartesian similarly controls the ground in philosophical discussions of value and meaning. The question "what is the nature and origin of value" seems to admit only two possible kinds of answers. Either we locate value in the material world as a natural property on a par with properties like size and mass, or we place value in the world of thinking things, treating it as originating in the way selves think about themselves and their world.
11. Put like this, the latter opinion is obviously more attractive. However, both options derive their sense from Cartesian polarities. When we turn to the notion of meaning, we find ourselves in the same Cartesian trap. Meaning, it seems, must be either a natural property or one which minds inject into the world. But could a purely natural object, like a leaf, be meaningful in the way that words are? The pressure is to admit that minds confer meaning on a world which is essentially meaningless: worlds are natural objects infused with meaning by the power of minds.
12. In both cases, we seem forced to the inevitable conclusion that meaning and value cannot be part of objective reality. The great liberating value of the tenet for natural science masks its damage.

ing philosophical consequences. To accept it is already to embrace a basic premise of Cartesian psychology: that the mind, must be qualitatively distinct from anything purely natural.

13. The abolition of value from the world also has disastrous effects on the moral sciences; moral (and aesthetic) properties are given no status in objective reality, but are projections of our minds on to the world. In ethics, as in psychology, the Cartesian framework is so constructed that the alternative to accepting it appears as an absurdity. To reinstate meaning and value in the world, by the Cartesians lights, is to admit the existence of supernatural properties in nature; but this, of course, is an insult to science.
14. Cartesianism not only marginalizes its opposition, but fragments it too. For example, Cartesian ideology makes it seem strange that there could be a relation between theories of perception and theories of politics. In this it is very cunning, for it makes such a link seem weird while itself covertly presiding over one. The Cartesian's idea of mind as the course of meaning and value in fact dictates his positions on both perception and politics.
15. In the former case, the leading idea is that the external world in its physicality is simply indigestible to the mind. For the world to impinge upon thought it must be translated into a kind of mental picture, an "idea". This issues in a classic theory of perception. "representative realism". on which the self is only indirectly aware of material things in virtue of a direct awareness of the contents of its own mind

16. Thus the Cartesian self is a lonely soul, boxed in by its own picture show, the sole occupant of a private cinema. The self is no less solitary and independent with respect to its values. Having removed value from objective reality, the Cartesian must present value as the creation of the self-sufficient self. Since the self is alone with the contents of its mind, it is natural to think that it attaches value to these contents as it chooses.
17. Cartesian selves are thus sovereign over their own values. Each come ready-made, not just to think, but to choose. On this view, the enterprise of politics becomes purely organisational: to bring it about as far as possible that Cartesian selves get what they have chosen. So the Cartesian conception of the self acts as a bridge between political individualism and representative realism in the theory of perception. Now, though Cartesianism presides over this alliance, it does so while making it appear that the theories of politics and theories of perception are utterly independent domains.
18. Perception is to do with what goes on inside selves, politics with relations between them. How could the former bear on the latter? Thus where the Cartesian is dominant, political theory and the philosophy of perception seem totally irrelevant to one another. On the few occasions where they are discussed together (such as in Lenin) the philosophy appears as an irrelevant intrusion into the political debate, functioning presumably as a purely polemical device employed by those who seek to discredit their opponents by any means. This is fragmentation at its most effective, making it difficult for the opponents of

Cartesianism in different fields even to perceive the relations between their respective attacks, let alone to articulate a unified alternative.

19. Cartesianism has been very effective in fragmenting its opposition. In recent years Cartesian conceptions have been subject to sustained attacks in various areas of philosophy. Notable contributions, inspired by Hegel (whom Cartesianism long succeeded in presenting as a dead duck) or by Wittgenstein, have come from Taylor and Sandel in political theory, from McDowell in ethics and metaphysics, and from Rorty in the philosophies of mind and knowledge.
20. Yet it remains difficult to see how these separate achievements can be woven into a viable alternative to the Cartesian orthodoxy. In the light of what we said, it may seem obvious that an alternative theory to Cartesianism is required. That is, we must seek, for example, to fit the respective insights of the enemies of Cartesianism into a theory of how the powers of thought and choice are the socially-constituted capacities of an essentially communal being, inhabiting a natural environment endowed with objective value and meaning. Yet, in fact, it is by no means obvious to all that this is the best strategy.
21. The enemies of Cartesianism are united in what they oppose, not in what they propose. Indeed, many would scoff at the very idea of a rival theory to Cartesianism, arguing that the notion that philosophical understanding must be theoretical is just another prejudice of Cartesianism.
22. While Cartesianism is dominant, it is hard to see what a non-Cartesian way of doing things should be

like.

23. For the enemies of Cartesianism, fragmentation is an obstacle, but one which is not insuperable. At present, the greatest threat from Cartesianism lies elsewhere. Cartesianism is not like a dominant political ideology only in the way it marginalizes and fragments its oppositions. It also resembles one in the way it handles the problems it itself creates. For example, scepticism is an inevitable worry within the Cartesian framework. Since the Cartesian self only has access to reality via the contents of mind, it can never check that those contents are actually caused by an external world at all.
24. Perhaps the self not only could function independently of the external world and of other selves, but actually does so function. Now, the Cartesian, far from recognising that his own conceptions are the very source of this problem, presents the problem as simply endemic within the human condition. The insolubility of the problem becomes natural, inevitable, something any right thinking person should recognise. Indeed the very existence of the problem is turned into a virtue, for the presence of such mysteries in the world serves to remind us that we are not just animals.
25. Many philosophers now see reasons for thinking that if the Cartesian framework were rejected many traditional philosophical problems would evaporate. However, the Cartesian makes this insight very difficult to articulate. First, since he makes these problems seem so natural, philosophers who deny the problems exist at all appear either lunatic or ridiculously commonsensical, peculiarly insensitive to the deep

puzzles of our existence.

26. Second, though its opponents agree that the abolition of the Cartesian framework will demolish, say, the problem of other mind's as we know it, they are not necessarily agreed about what we shall find in its place. Even without Cartesianism, there must remain something for philosophy to say about the existence of the external world. Or is that itself a Cartesian prejudice?
27. What is worrying here is not just that the Cartesian is up to his old tricks again, making life hard for his opponent. The real danger issues from the resulting picture of the concerns of philosophy as a discipline. The idea is that philosophy, enters a division of labour with science: while science takes on the material world, philosophy deals with the inner world of the self. In analysing that self, philosophy uncovers certain intriguing puzzles which turn out to be impossible to solve.
28. Philosophy is now seen as a discipline which admits of no progress, except that it somehow gets more expert at failing to solve the insoluble. Now, those who are exponents of a Cartesian political philosophy may well lose patience with the pursuits of philosophers, particularly in a climate of scarce resources. Believing as they do that questions of the nature of the mind have no bearing whatsoever on issues of how best to organise society, they may begin to feel that philosophy is a luxury, a collection of mind games of no practical significance, save for the demand which its elite practitioners make on the economy to support them.

29. Philosophy is a non-subject. Due to Cartesianism's dominance, the anti-Cartesians are not well placed to come to philosophy's rescue. First, they agree that philosophy as it is traditionally conceived is a non-subject. Second, those of their positive suggestions about the future of philosophy which are widely comprehensible appear dangerous, unfamiliar, radical.
30. All this is a great irony because the Cartesian ideology feeds the very political positions which are now turned so ruthlessly against philosophy as a discipline. It seems Cartesianism must be overthrown if the subject to which Descartes made so signal a contribution is to have a future. Our weakness, like that of so many political dissenters, is that we as yet have no clear idea of what should replace the lethal orthodoxy we have inherited. Such ideas can emerge only as the struggle for power intensifies; yet if the struggle is to continue at all, we must find some way to loosen the grip of Cartesianism. Time, however, seems to be running out.

## The Article

### Attempts at Resolutions

The numbers refer to the paragraphs in the article, in order.

- 1.a) Can philosophy provide cash value?  
I suggest it can in the sense I have given it below.
- b) Can "intellectual dissension" be healthy?  
I suggest that the exposure of different metaphysical systems must be healthy. Without it, progress must eventually be stifled.

- 2.a) The idea of a Cartesian conception of the self supposes a common conception, common to most of us, achieved, perhaps, through bewitchment by language. A possible way out of this is through a review of some of the metaphysics in Collingwood's sense.

- 4.a) 'to talk about "the self" is already to talk in Cartesian terms...' But, is the meaning of self so rigid, and so dependent on Descartes? I suggest, below, it need not be.
- b) "Descartes's idea was that selves are primarily subjects of thought." To me the idea of my or someone else's self entails self reflexivity which is, for me, a systemic quality. My mind, I suggest, is a phenomenon which arises out of the ability my brain has, as an open complex system, of contemplating not only things other than myself but also myself. Contemplating myself and my ideas results, perhaps, from my brain's ability to feed information back in to itself.

5a) "The Cartesian self" is self-sufficient - independent of all others. "What it is can, indeed must be explained without reference to other selves."

Is this actually possible? "I think therefore I am" can be seen as circular as also can "I am therefore I think." If I can say "I think," which is self referential, I must be able to say I am (and vice versa), which is obviously equally self referential. This utterance, namely the Cogito, of a self referential information system is dependent upon another self-referential information system that of human communication, which includes language, which would probably not exist and entail meaning without interactors. In other words a self can not say that it is, and certainly can not explain what it is without a bigger interactive information system which includes language. This system can not fairly be used for the self-reference and then be deemed not to exist. Where there is self-referentiality there is circularity, and paradox can there exist as a result of the capability - which arises out of the self-referentiality - of representationally cutting the connections in the circularity and hence giving the illusion that the sections can exist on their own. Hence, the ability of an individual self to refer to itself in intelligible terms to others is in my view dependent upon its being a subsystem of a bigger system i.e. a collection of selves which as such have developed another system: language.

b) "The Cartesian self is self-contained: it can function in complete independence of the material world in which it lives an independent mental life."

There is a supposition here, which presumably derives naturally from experience, that that which is material is essentially different from, and can

be separated from, that which is mental. I do not hold this supposition, and hope to make my position clearer later on.

6.a) "...radical distinction between mind and matter"  
... "no one thing can be both a material and a thinking thing" ...

7.a) "those who wish to deny this dualism are compelled to hold that material things can think." These statements do not hold together unless the metaphysics and hence the language of mind matter dualism is accepted consciously, or supposed subconsciously.

7.b) "The anti-Cartesian, if he is to frame his theory at all, seems compelled to play the Cartesian's rules."

Why? Again, this is only the case if he supposes mind/matter dualism.

c) "He must accept Cartesian concepts... the operations of a material thing"

This is to treat what the words seem to mean, systematically, as opposed to systemically. That is, it overlooks our capacity to form analogical notions of phenomena such as minds arising out of complex systems consisting of interactions of material (e.g. nerves) and non-material (e.g. electricity, heat, light and sound) entities.

d) "The power of representation, which it seems simply impossible for a material system to possess."

Does it? What sort of representations? What about images on photographic plates? What of mimicry in plant and animal morphology and ethology? What about reflections?

8.a) "The reductionist strategy gains its very intelligibility from the polarities of the Cartesian

framework,"

Must all anti-Cartesians be reductionists (who reduce human behaviour to that of lower animals and ultimately to the physical laws controlling the behaviour of inanimate matter? Must they suppose that all these laws are known? What is the status(e.g. is it any more than a supposition?) of the idea that natural laws exist? Is not the concept of what a reductionist is far too general anyway, and does it have any greater status than that of a piece of descriptive metaphysics?

The philosophical "nice point" that in order to oppose dualism, dualism must be acknowledgment to exist seems too elementary to warrant serious consideration. Philosophy, by its nature, implies the aspiration to a metastate about a discourse (and hence a metametastate etc. will always seem a possibility though hardly accessible intellectually). As far as this "nice point" is concerned, a different, bigger, metaphysical system can facilitate the adoption of a metastate capable of getting outside dualism. Hence dualism can be considered without being implicitly accepted as being true.

9.a) Why look for an "anti-dualist position which stands most chance of being true by the Cartesian's lights?"

Here there seems to be a supposition that to counter an argument, that argument's suppositions must be entailed in the countering argument. A metaphysical shift rather than a rational refutation, point for point, seems to me to be required.

b) Berkley's doctrine was that there is no material substance and that things such as stones and tables are collections of "ideas" or sensations, which can exist only in minds and only for so long as they are perceived. Mention of Berkley's

doctrine seems to suggest that the only way Messrs. Bakhurst and Dancy can see of countering Descartes is to produce theories which reject either mind or matter altogether. I shall offer a theory which combines them, below.

10.a) Value and meaning.

The question: "What is the nature and origin of value?" supposes that "value" must have an "origin" as well as a "nature". (Here, there is a 'why' question presupposed in a 'what' question. In my remarks I shall be aware of this as also of the fact that "value" is an abstract noun which implies existence which in some instances of space/time may not be actual.) A behaviourist might argue that we can ascribe the abstract notion of value to behaviour simply because we observe the exercise of preference which presumably occurs because it works. Using metaphors from systemic thinking I suggest that in my case what can simplistically be termed a combination of emotion and reason, facilitates my setting up feedback loops in my thinking which assist in my maintaining a degree of mental stability; values as ideas provide turning points for some of these loops. This may be synonymous with placing:

10.b) "value in the world of thinking things" but

I do not see that it necessarily derives its sense from Cartesian polarities just because I have rejected the idea of locating "value in the material world as a natural property on a par with properties like size and mass". One has only to look at how size and mass are measured in order to make a distinction between a class containing them and a class containing value. I can say this irrespective of Descartes because I have previously rejected the distinction between the material

world and thinking world, and I have chosen to think in terms of a world of information, some of which is combined in to complex systems, and some of which demonstrates the sophisticated systemic phenomenon of mental reflexivity which we call consciousness.

11.a) meaning: is it a "natural property or one which minds inject in to the world?"

Regarded in terms of information, which in all cases would seem to be an idea dependent on a combination of perceived similarities and differences, I can conceive of meaning as an interactive phenomenon requiring a sender, though not necessarily one with intentionality, and a receiver. The meaning a leaf has, is different from that of words, therefore.

b)"If minds, material or non material, injected meaning into the world, would meaning then not be a natural property?" This distinction between natural properties and those which minds inject in to the world may well be a useful thinking tool, but to avoid traps, an awareness of its limitations is important.

The use of words implies intentionality which could be regarded as a property of mind, but if my systemic notion of mind out of information is accepted it may be reasonable to regard intentionality as deriving from the systemic self reflexivity which I consider consciousness could be.

A leaf is information and hence it can convey information (which is dependent on interpretation) but not in the same way as words do. Words can be seen as part of an information system which is at a different logical level from things like leaves which it is part of the functioning of words to describe.

Words can be regarded as being part of a system, namely language, which is about other systems, some of which contain things such as leaves. Our language is a sophisticated development of animal communication systems which themselves contain different logical levels. (I say more about logical levels and logical types in chapter 10.)

- c) "Worlds are natural objects infused with meaning by the power of minds."

The information of the world is derived from its variety and it does not contain meaning in an intentional sense. It does not contain meaning in any sense unless it interacts with an interpreting information system, such as an animal or human being, and even then it does not have meaning in the same sense in which words about it do. But, the interpreting information systems do not have to be regarded as being separate from the world. To me, intuitively, it seems just as acceptable to consider them as integral with the information of the world as it does to consider them as separate from it. Indeed, one might ask why a separation should be supposed, and, further, whether there is evidence to support the existence of such a separation. Evidence would turn the idea of a separation into a proposition in a Collingwoodian sense, as opposed to what I suggest it is, in a Collingwoodian sense, an absolute presupposition.

- 12.a)."...inevitable conclusion that meaning and value cannot be part of objective reality."

This supposes meaning and value as derived from Cartesianism. It also supposes an objective reality, and, furthermore, it supposes that it is accessible. The notion of objective reality may be a useful thinking tool - and perhaps a necessary stabiliser of consciousness - but to consider that it is actually accessible would seem naively

over-ambitious. The inaccessibility of objective reality can be clearly seen when it is considered that no two individuals can observe the same phenomenon from the same place at the same time.

b) "...that the mind, as the source of meaning and value must be qualitatively distinct from anything purely natural."

Only if we insist on separating mind from the rest of the world.

13. If we consider mind in my sense, there is no need for a source of meaning and value because they can be seen to arise out of interactions between and within information systems. I do not need moral and aesthetic properties to have their origin in objective reality, and, further, I can not hold this to be the case because I consider objective reality to be, while significant as an idea, actually inaccessible.

16. "Since the self is alone with the contents of its mind it is natural to think that it attaches value to these contents as it chooses."

This implies the supposition that the self is alone with the contents of its mind and is not an open information system as I have suggested it could be. I suggest that there are many inputs in the form of constraints etc. involved at an individual and at a community level. Hence the choices are not completely free, however much they may seem to be, because we can not free ourselves of, and hence from, information inputs, and therefore, intrinsically, the choices have to be consistent with individual survival in enough cases to facilitate community survival. This might be a basis for a systemic view of ethics.

20. Why should I want to weave separate achievements

"into a viable alternative to the Cartesian orthodoxy"?

I can fit my insights "in to a theory of how the powers of thought and choice are the socially constituted capacities of an essentially communal being, inhabiting a natural environment", but I can not show that this natural environment is "endowed with objective value and meaning," though I do not feel that this is important. To me my environment seems to be endeared with value and meaning which perceivers ascribe to, and perceive in, it.

21. Is not all understanding, not just philosophical understanding, theoretical?

Bearing in mind that Descartes wanted to produce indubitable mathematical type proofs for our beliefs, I suggest that the statement "the notion that philosophical understanding must be theoretical is just another prejudice of Cartesianism," would be better stated by substituting: 'philosophy as practised with an emphasis on systematic reasoning, as opposed to a combination of systematic and systemic reasoning,' for "Cartesianism".

22. I do not find it "hard to see what a non-Cartesian way of doing things should be like."

I suggest that the influence of Descartes himself has been overstated. An overriding influence would seem to be the reductive nature of words and the seductive power within the medium of language of systematic reasoning, much development of which preceded Descartes.

23. I do not feel fragmented.

Scepticism was not a worry, I suggest, for Descartes. Is it inevitable that we presuppose a

separation of self and mind? I do not. Can we conceive of means of having direct access to reality? Does not direct access to reality constitute a state of being integral with reality, whatever that would be like: solipsism perhaps? If we are satisfied we do not have direct access, then surely we can be more certain of an external cause.

24. "Perhaps the self functions independently."

I suggest it does not because it is part of an open, though very complex, information system with multiple inputs, tangible and intangible, visible and invisible, and also a high degree of circularity in the form of feedback loops. But, because some of these feedback circuits constitute self reflexiveness at a very high degree of complexity and hence sophistication, a state of consciousness exists. Further, as a result of the self reflexivity of the system, the potential exists to step outside it in an information sense, and spontaneous change in outlook and attitude can result (I say more about this in a section on pragmatic paradox). Such change is possibly the result of a combination of the effects of various inputs, perhaps over an extended period, and the complex mathematics going on inside the system which constitutes the mind. This may be analogous to, or synonymous with, some of the mathematics of catastrophe theory and morphogenesis. It is significant that the variety within the system is subjected to complex stimuli (inputs) themselves of high variety, from without. Hence it is a complex information system within complex systems. The latter includes the "(physical) environment" and social environment, at different levels. Hence I am just an animal but, I suppose, a more complex one than an amoeba.

25. Not being a philosopher I have no difficulty with this paragraph. I do not deny these problems exist for those whose metaphysical systems support the problems, and also for those who may have different metaphysical systems, which are freer from the influence of Descartes, but who have, as a matter of course, to interact with the former group.

For philosophy to maintain credibility, I believe it must cultivate a more common-sensical side related to action. It must, however, still maintain sensitivity to the deep puzzles of our existence, but it must be prepared to tackle these with new metaphysical systems without losing sight of the old ones.

### Philosophy

Philosophy is not a subject in the sense in which History, Geography, Languages, Maths and Science are subjects, because it is about or "meta to" other subjects. It is not a non-subject but a subject at a different logical level. (I suggest it is at a higher logical level because it provides a system which encompasses the other subjects.) If I accept that philosophy is about knowledge in the sense of 'what is' and 'what happens,' I then find it easy to see that many of the problems which arise are stated in words and hence the philosophy about them is to a large extent words.

### Three difficulties

Three particular difficulties arise from this: 1. not all that seems to be or to happen can necessarily be stated in words; 2. once stated the words have the potential to engender new problems (such as those that arise through misinterpretation, misunderstanding,

metaphysical bewitchment and paradox); and 3. words, if recorded, have a permanence often greater than that to which they refer, and hence temporal decontextualization is facilitated (and the same applies spatially).

### Information systems and levels of knowing

I suggest that if philosophy is to retain credibility, philosophers must regard themselves as being concerned with information in a broad sense, including information systems of varying complexity. They should continue to concern themselves with all that they do now but also cultivate an awareness of a, perhaps limitless, series of levels of knowing. Metaphysical knowledge would constitute mobile boundaries (plural because of the relativity of levels and different suppositional systems in different individuals) a lack of awareness of which could lead to knots in understanding and even paradox. Many of these problems arise because they are stated in words, and attempts at their resolution are made in words.

### Words and logical levels

Words are clearly constituents of language and language is a living and evolving system which can easily be seen to have the potential to give rise to different logical levels because it can so easily be turned upon itself. But language is not the only system in human behaviour which can do this. Language (verbal) is just part of a larger system of communication/interaction many parts of which have the potential to produce knots and paradox.

### Theory of logical types

Russell's theory of logical types (about which I have said more in a previous chapter) can provide a

basis for the development of an awareness of metasystems because it is a theory which can be interpreted as being applicable not only to the words which describe a system, but also to the system itself. This is a significant link between philosophy, with metaphysical systems particularly in mind, and an interpretation of how things work in terms of information, information flow and information systems (all systems actually being information systems, if information is taken to mean all physical and psychological entities).

### Philosophy and systems theory

I am trying to suggest a respectable link between philosophy and systems theory because the philosophy itself must for me come out of, and be appreciated through, systems of knowing which necessarily include systems of words. For philosophy to be useful in the untying of knots in my understanding it must at some points map on to the observation of systems or, at any rate, the metaphors I use in attempts to make sense of them. Systems for me consist of interacting information and "information" here I use in a wide sense including anything. Systems are usually contained within bigger systems, but, for the purposes of study, boundaries can usefully be set. Thus I regard Cartesianism and positivism, for examples, as systems of knowing within metaphysical systems which can themselves be accommodated in bigger (higher) metaphysical systems.

### Conclusions

As soon as I talk about what I find Cartesianism to mean, and suggest an alternative, I accept I am automatically operating in the Cartesian system, but if successful in getting outside it, also in a metasystem which accommodates what I think Cartesianism is.

I do not know of any positive suggestions for the fu-

ture of philosophy. My view is that philosophers must feel free to explore those areas which appear profitable - I claim I have suggested one- while maintaining care and concern for their heritage.

### **PART III** HISTORY AND ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

Part III consists of one chapter, Chapter 13: 'A brief account of the history and ethos of the school'. This is an attempt to give a flavour of how the school developed, in order to provide a broad context for Part IV. Issues and experiences, which consists of a general overview and four other chapters which cover particularly significant issues in more detail.

Amateurish start.  
Take-Over.  
Expansion and co-education.  
Gradual evolution.

Ethos p.207

Principles.

1. The school was not to be entirely traditional.
2. Assignments.
3. Art, drama and music.
4. Craft.
5. Hobbies.
6. Self discipline.
7. Games.
8. Camping and expeditions.
9. House system.

New headmaster p.210

Pre-prep. p.211

Initial opposition.  
Withdrawal of total opposition.  
Number in the pre-prep.  
A limit imposed but exceeded.  
Continuing source of contention.  
Trend away from boarding.  
Another argument against increasing day numbers.

My view coloured by nostalgia, but supported with some reasons.

Two different headmasters. p.216

Previous headmaster's vigilance.  
Analogue for my idea of a senior master.  
Subject of analogue probably more exceptional than initially I had thought.

The school is now a private co-educational preparatory school for children aged 3 to 6 in the pre-prep. and from 7 to 14 in the main school.

Amateurish start

The school was started in 1948 in a somewhat amateurish and fairly chaotic way by a woman who was an outstanding personality and much liked. Financial crises were, apparently, quite frequent. It had been known for stinging nettles to be cooked and served when the funds did not run to orthodox vegetables.

Take-Over

In 1954 the school was taken over by another outstanding character who had been looking for somewhere to practise his own, to some extent progressive, educational philosophy. Soon afterwards, the academic standard improved and more boys passed Common Entrance. The school was then a private business. In 1966 it became a charitable trust with a board of governors.

Expansion and co-education

In 1972 the school became co-educational, the proportion of girls later rising to, and staying at, about a third. The total of children in the school rose from around 30 in 1948 to around 100 in 1954. In 1967 it was just over 120 and by 1976 it approached 200. This included about 30 day children. A new headmaster was appointed in 1983.

### Gradual evolution

The years 1954-83 saw a gradual evolution of a predominantly boarding school. The academic standard had been improved quite rapidly after 1954, without much difficulty as it had not been good before, but ever since then there has been a contention that the academic standard has not been good enough. The breadth of the curriculum, and the more progressive ethos as regards academic work and discipline have often been blamed for this. The headmaster who was appointed in 1983 said that almost the first question he was asked by a parent when he arrived was what was he going to do about the academic standard. In my view the truth is that the academic side is not as bad as it is often made out to be, but, at the same time, I think it could profitably be improved. While the majority of leavers pass in to Canford, Bryanston and Sherborne each year, those schools, however, would not be regarded as being on the same academic level as Winchester, Eton, Harrow, Charterhouse, Marlborough and Radley. However we have sent a few children including scholars, to all these latter schools, though not as many recently as we did around twenty years ago.

### Ethos

The ethos of the school is regarded as having been largely established by the new headmaster of 1954. He was never very forthcoming about his educational theory or general aims. When asked about these he would usually talk briefly and then refer the enquirer to a book called *The Burning Bow* which is largely a collection of papers and addresses by T. F. Coade who was the headmaster of Bryanston School from 1932-1959. His reticence, or perhaps inarticulacy about his theories in particular - for otherwise he was remarkably lucid - meant that many who worked for him, most of whom

necessarily came from more traditional beginnings, often conflicted with him over matters of policy. I did not feel satisfied that I had a reasonable grasp of his ideals until after I had read 'The Burning Bow' and two other books: 'The Educational Innovators', Progressive Schools (1881-1967), by W.A. Stewart, which has a section on Bryanston, and 'Bryanston' by M.C. Morgan. With the combination of this reading and the experience of working in the school over some twenty years I feel better qualified to try to enumerate some of the principles.

### Principles

#### 1. The school was not to be entirely traditional

In 1954 the headmaster's aim was to run a boys' boarding preparatory school which was different from the traditional ones he had previously worked in briefly, and, I suspect, attended himself.

#### 2. Assignments

He intended that a traditional curriculum should be followed but that depth of study should be well balanced with breadth. Some regular project type work, loosely akin to the assignment system in the Dalton Plan which had some influence on Bryanston, should be pursued by all in the leaving and scholarship forms. This took the form of evening assignments, as opposed to preps, for the senior boys.

Though the efficiency of this method for the less academic child has been questioned from time to time - the question being raised as to whether ordinary preps would not be more suitable - the general feeling, supported by feedback from children who have left, has been that the system has provided them with an excel-

Tent preparation for the time when they have had to start to find things out for themselves later at public school.

### **3. Art, drama and music**

Art, drama and music should play a significant part in the education of all children, each one being taught to play a musical instrument, the violin, in a class at the age of 8.

### **4. Craft**

Likewise craft, every child learning woodwork in class at the age of eight.

### **5. Hobbies**

An hour long evening hobby period-winter and summer- was a significant feature and an added contribution to the breadth of the curriculum.

In the Burning Bow there is an interesting section entitled 'Hobbies ' which is relevant.

### **6. Self Discipline**

Self discipline was to be encouraged in opposition to discipline achieved through fear. "Discipline must contain freedom otherwise it degenerates in to compulsion - which is the discipline of fear" [The Burning Bow p.224].

The headmaster said (on one occasion I remember) that he did not wish to be a martinet headmaster.

## 7. Games

Good standards, but without any hint of professionalism, in traditional games such as Soccer, Cricket and Rugger were encouraged, but again a breadth of activity was an essential part of the ethos with sports such as sailing, riding, tennis and swimming having significant places-riding was to be particularly strong and was pursued by the majority from the early days.

## 8. Camping and Expeditions

Camping and expeditions, both outward bound and more academic, were encouraged from the beginning. The whole school has for many years now scattered in different directions-some to France, others to the Isle of Mull, North Wales, others cycling, riding and sailing - for a week's expedition at the end of the summer term.

## 9. House System

A sense of responsibility for other children in the school has been fostered by a house system with each house divided in to four patrols which are a relic of a once strong but now non-existent scouting system.

### New Headmaster

In 1983 a new headmaster was appointed. He had previously run a smaller, all boys' and predominantly day school. His wife had started and run a pre-prep. department there, and she had come to us with the explicit intention of starting a pre-prep. After two years she opened a pre-prep. at this her new school. This catered for children of ages 3 to 4, 4 to 5 and 5 to 6. The school had previously, since 1971, had a junior form for children from 6 to 7 years old. This was to continue.

### Pre-prep.

The whole question of whether we should have a pre-prep., and, if so, where, and how big it should be, and how much money should be spent on it, was a source of considerable controversy in the school over the years 1984 to 1987. I became particularly involved at one stage and so I include a short separate subsection on this subject. However, I include some detail here because the period of the discussion and institution of the pre-prep. was significant in the school's development.

#### **Initial Opposition**

The opening of the pre-prep. department was initially opposed by many long standing staff, on the ground that it would increase the proportion of day children to such an extent that the school would become predominantly a day school, which would change its character adversely and lead to a loss of revenue unless the numbers/fees structure were altered. The argument in favour of the pre-prep. was that it would guarantee a supply of entrants to the main school.

#### **Withdrawal of Total Opposition**

Partly influenced, I am sure, by the previous headmaster, I initially opposed the pre-prep. on the ground that it would empty beds, the point being that on the existing numbers/fees structure the money was really made out of the boarders. However, along with other staff, I soon realised that opposing the pre-prep. was a waste of time because running such a department was the forte of the new headmaster's wife and it had been made clear that she had come to us with the explicit intention of starting another.

So I then took the view that we should have a pre-prep. but that it should consist of no more than 30 pupils to start with.

### **Number in the Pre-prep.**

A total of 30, apparently the minimum number viable according to the bursar, would have allowed for three forms of 10, and it would have restricted the flow from the pre-prep. to the main school to ten a year, allowing spare capacity of about 25 for boarding spaces. I say more about these figures in my separate section. The important point to make here is that a limit, in my view, needed to be imposed because the headmaster's wife was known to want the pre-prep. to grow to as large a size as she could handle.

### **A Limit Imposed But Exceeded**

When the pre-prep. started, the governors imposed a limit of 30, but this was soon exceeded, apparently without any check, and the total is now, 1990, 50 or slightly more.

### **Continuing source of contention**

The pre-prep. has been a subject of continuing contention between the headmasters and their wives and the governors on one side and the majority of the staff on the other. The institution of the pre-prep., along with the headmaster's apparent lack of effort as regards recruiting boarders, has played a significant part in an increase in the number of day children.

The first major division was over whether or not to have a pre-prep. The opposition was on the ground I have stated.

The second was over the possibility of building a new pre-prep. incorporating a plan for improved girls' boarding accommodation. This was costed at £150,000 at a time when the financial position was unhealthy. The staff opposed this and were for once supported by the board of governors, the chairman of which thanked the staff for their care, but I think the result was inevitable on account of the financial position. Since then, the staff have successfully opposed moving the stables block, which would have been an unnecessary added cost, to provide a new pre-prep. site. However, the staff were unsuccessful in their opposition to the building of a new separate and extravagant pre-prep. department on a site not a stone's throw from the headmaster's back doorstep. The staff's argument then was that it was imprudent to spend £150,000 or more on a new department, adequate accommodation for which already existed, when the long term effects of the department would most probably be to reduce the amount of existing space required for boarding accommodation. Over this issue some staff lobbied individual governors. I, as staff representative, wrote a letter, which in retrospect was a mistake, opposing the new building to the chairman of the governors. But the governors responded by deciding to have a new building and that it should be built as near as possible to where the headmaster's wife wanted it, though without moving the stables. The architects initial costings were of the order of £60,000 but the successful tender after the headmaster's wife had insisted on further additions and the design had had to be changed for the new site - this provided the headmaster's wife and the architect with the opportunity to revise the plans, in my view, each to their own advantage- was just over £150,000. When the governors made their decision they at the same time changed the make up of the development committee, basically increasing considerably the number in favour of the building of a new pre-prep; they also,

in my view, included more of those who could be relied upon to toe the line generally. I was surprised I was not asked to resign from the committee, particularly as I had had my letter to the chairman returned at the request, apparently, of the board. However, though my letter did not achieve my desired effect, - it was I think in retrospect naive of me to expect that it would - there were lessons to be learnt from what it did not achieve and from the reactions to it. I say more about this in my section on the preprep.

#### A trend away from boarding

The trend is now, 1990, clearly away from boarding and towards day places, particularly for boys. This is apparently in line with a current national trend but those who would like to see the school try to retain more of its tradition argue that there still exists a boarding market and that the school needs to compete harder for the potential boarders. This necessarily requires the attraction of children from further away. I support this view as I see it as the only way of attracting enough discerning parents who appreciate what the school has traditionally tried to offer. I consider that the school is best advised to continue to attempt to function as its tradition and organisation prescribe, with sufficient modification to keep up to date with educational developments. In other words it seems best to try to do that which we are known for and that which we presumably do quite well; the difficulty is that the qualities of the school are to some extent unconventional and without doubt not easily described in words, and therefore not so easily appreciated by all of today's parents, many more of whom seem to be looking for more readily quantifiable pay off from education, at an early age.

The previous headmaster often told parents that in

his view the academic achievements at the ages of 18 and 21 were much more important than those at 13 to 14 when the children would normally leave his school. He thought that it was better to have a broad curriculum without great academic pressure at the preparatory school stage so that many potential seeds could be sown, some of which would bear fruit in the future. He thought that many children who were greatly pressurised academically, burnt themselves out before they ever reached university stage. Though I thought we could and should have been more efficient academically, I broadly agreed with him, and had to admit that what he said seemed to be borne out by reports from ex-pupils, many of whom seemed to fair very well academically after fairly indifferent careers with us. Nevertheless, an almost inevitable long standing difficulty with his declared policy was how to convince prospective parents of its long term efficacy.

#### Another argument against increasing day numbers

There is another argument against allowing the numbers of day children to increase more than is unavoidable. This is as follows. It is likely that the more day children we take, the more parents we will have who are marginally committed to paying for education privately. This would not matter when the economic climate were favourable, but it could lead to a major exodus of children if times grew harder. This was another reason for working hard to recruit boarders who would mainly come from further afield and whose parents would be more likely to have a long term family commitment to independent education.

My view coloured by nostalgia, but supported  
with some reasons

**Two Different Headmasters**

No doubt my view is partly coloured by nostalgia, but I can support it with some reasons.

I suggest the previous headmaster attracted a more discerning type of parent than those attracted now. This was because he had made a name for providing an education somewhat different from that of the more traditional preparatory schools, and, more importantly perhaps, he was well able to convey his enthusiasm for it.

It has been said that his successor has had a difficult act to follow. But, it has also been said, by a long established member of staff, that unfortunately his successor has not got an act. This was perhaps a bit unkind but it illustrates the state of affairs as I think many of us see it.

My view now, 1991, is that the headmaster is really quite satisfied that the school become more day pupil orientated and that perhaps it is preferable that he attract the sort of pupils he wants.

The present incumbent has really instigated nothing significant except for the pre-prep. He has induced and allowed, perhaps encouraged, through the pre-prep. the increase of day children, although he has stated on more than one occasion that the increase is contrary to his intentions.

Apart from this he has really merely allowed the system to tick over, though apparently without much understanding of, and hence very little manifest en-

thusiasm for, the special nature of the school. He apparently lacks interest, particularly in the more peripheral activities which help to give the school its special character - for example he hasn't expressed any interest in the riding for over a year. However, I would say that perhaps the most noticeable aspect missing now is the sense of a personal touch.

### **Previous Headmaster's Vigilance**

This was not the case under the previous headmaster who seemed very much aware of what was going on everywhere, because he made it his business to be around and informed as much as he could. He was very adept at knowing what was going on. This awareness seemed essential for keeping the staff committed at a high level; the functioning seemed to occur better with a high rate of pupil teacher contact on account of the ethos and hence nature of the system. He provided a tension which affected pupils and staff, keeping them functioning at a relatively high level of awareness.

### **Analogue for my idea of a senior master**

When I considered the idea of having a senior master, in 1986, which was largely in order to try to attend to the continuing disquiet about discipline, I was acting on my perception of the system requiring someone to exercise greater vigilance and hence create the necessary tensions. Fortunately there was a member of staff who was capable and inclined, in fact keen, to do this. As a model I had in mind an outstanding man who had filled a similar position as assistant to the headmaster where I was at school.

The man I had in mind seems to have been exceptional. I have not come across anyone anywhere near equal to him doing a headmaster's-he later became head-

master of the school—or a second master's job. It may be unfair to compare my present headmaster, assistant headmaster and senior master with him, but I believe some of his qualities could be emulated. I found it profitable to look back at his functioning and try to see if I could paint a picture, including the people available, that might have the potential to recreate part of it. This was with an awareness that it was valid only to try to recreate that which seemed to me to be contextually relevant.

### **Subject of Analogue Probably More Exceptional Than Initially I Had Thought**

He was probably more exceptional than initially I thought because, on reflection, he seems to have been more able than our headmasters and senior master put together.

He was an impressive academic and an outstanding maths teacher, a good musician—on occasions when both the headmaster and the music master were absent he would conduct the chapel service and play the organ in a significantly slick yet elegant way—and an efficient though not "paper prolific" administrator. When he died quite suddenly, after about sixteen years as headmaster, one of the difficulties faced by his successor was that there was so little written down; he had carried so much in his head.

He also had the added advantage of being a tall and imposing figure with natural authority. One thing, however, which he noticeably lacked, was any obvious warmth or paternalism towards the pupils, but this very probably contributed to his natural authority, helping to make him seem somewhat distanced and rather aloof.

Nevertheless, when I, as an adult, saw him in action with his staff-I used to meet him when I took my football and cricket teams to play against his school-I was impressed by the considerate and in some cases paternal way in which he treated them.

It was this type of consideration for others which I found to be so lacking in the rather loud mouthed, self righteous, and self centred evangelical types, who tended to be influential in this school when I started work. The behaviour of some of the evangelical types, the headmaster not included, eventually made me find it very hard, perhaps impossible, to resist making public comment about it, and attempting to oppose its proliferation: this is the subject of Part IV chapter 16.

I include this information here because it helps to illustrate the point that neither the present headmaster nor his second in command approached my model, either naturally or by dint of their efforts. To me it was clear that they could have been profitably complemented with someone who was interested in making an effort to deal with behaviour problems and the general tone of things, in a systematic way. The man I had in mind had, amongst other qualities, the advantage of being tall and efficient and self confident. Our second master is efficient (though "paper-prolific"), confident in his way, but he seems to find it very difficult to face head on any problems with people, including children, and, added to this he is physically small. Our headmaster is a large man, but rather plodding; his utterances must make his lack of confidence and lack of a grip of things evident to all, including the children, who hear them.

I refer to the appointment of the senior master, and some of the outcomes as I saw them, in more detail

in my section on discipline and the senior master, Part IV, chapter 16.

Part IV, Issues and experiences, begins with Chapter 14 which is an overview of the period when I pursued my enquiry while at the same time, as staff representative, concerning myself with a sometimes troubled period of development in the school. This sets a context for four following chapters which illustrate change in my thinking and acting as applied to actual issues in the school. These were written as independent accounts, and, as such, in some cases duplicate one another to varying extents.

In most of these accounts I have erred on the side of telling more - including much detail in the form of entire papers and records of meetings and issues - rather than less of a story, in order to create as vivid a picture as seems reasonable. This was done in the belief that theory needs to be supported by examples, and, for examples to be meaningful, detail is required in order that sense can be made of the context. This belief is supported by another belief that knowledge, and hence issues, are dependent on context.

Through its predominantly reductive nature, language tends to decontextualise; hence in many cases the context is left to be rebuilt through individual's interpretations whereby misunderstanding can result. In attempts to obviate some of this, I have tried to be generous with examples and descriptions.

Chapter 15, 'An issue regarding evangelicalism' is a story about objections I raised about what I perceived as an unhealthy domination of the school by influential evangelicals amongst school staff and governors. I made this protest before I began my enquiry; I suggest it is an example of an application of incomplete, largely analytical and systematic thinking to a

human concern which required much more sensitivity to the metaphysics and the systemic phenomena involved.

Chapter 16, 'Discipline', is a story about attempts I made before, and during, my enquiry in order to attend to concerns about discipline. I suggest this account demonstrates development from my rather limited analytical, systematic approach towards a more sensitive combination of systematic and systemic thinking which includes awareness of differing and hence conflicting metaphysical systems.

Chapter 17, 'Academic standards' is about concerns which have existed about academic standards in the school, and some of my private suggestions for attending to them. I suggest this account demonstrates systematic and systemic thinking combined, once again, with sensitivity to different metaphysical systems involved.

Chapter 18, 'Conflict over the building of a new pre-preparatory department' is a story about an issue over which members of staff, including me, became passionate in opposition to headmasters and governors. I suggest it is an example of how I, as staff representative, became drawn in to conflict which seemed to escalate on account of previously established context markers, and which seemed to lead to my remaining withdrawn from such conflict henceforth.

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## CHAPTER 14.

## AN OVERVIEW OF SOME SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF THE COURSE OF THE ENQUIRY

An overview of the history and progress of this enquiry including some of the significant issues, events and developments in my thinking and acting.

### **This Enquiry**

This is an enquiry into some of my thinking and acting in relation to aspects of the development of a school in which I have worked permanently since 1976 and in which I first worked as a student teacher in 1967.

### **The Period**

Most of my enquiry concerns a period since 1983 when a new headmaster took office. However, since some of the issues under consideration can be regarded more beneficially in relation to a longer period of time, I have included some information and discussion about the earlier history of the school.

### **Aspects of Change**

I concentrate mainly on aspects of change in which I have been directly involved and in which my views have come into conflict with individuals and groups who in most cases hold more official power than I do, but I also comment on change in which I have taken little part.

### **Philosophy, Systems Theory, and Change in Me**

While I have been attending to aspects of change in the school, I have also been reading some philosophy and systems theory, and I have attended seminars given

by Mr. W.M. Brookes. I ave been aware that, over the period of my enquiry, I have also been changing.

### **My Thinking as an Object of the Enquiry**

My theories as regards action and enquiry have changed during this period. Consequently the changes in my own thinking have to some extent become objects of the enquiry. In many cases these have been changes in suppositional states - a term developed from the metaphysics of R.G. Collingwood, which I have discussed in some detail - the idea of which provides a basis for my thinking as regards some of what could happen to, and in, my own and other minds.

### **Brief Overview**

For a brief overview of significant aspects of my action and development, I refer to my year by year outline of events on page 23.

## About This Overview

### The content

#### **A variety of styles.**

In this more detailed overview, I have chronicled some of the issues and events of the relevant period. I include a selection of extracts from my notes, papers and letters, accounts of meetings, and comments I wrote at the time. All these remain much as they were written, so there is a variety of more and less formal styles.

#### **Long Standing Issues**

Certain long standing issues, such as those concerning discipline, academic standards and my questioning of the evangelical nature of the school, have seemed to require more space than could be afforded in this overview. Consequently I have included these in separate sections, though I mention them here.

#### **Dates**

The overview is chronological and includes dates which are in many cases approximated to the month and year.

#### **Comments**

As regards some past issues, I include comments I have made more recently, but these are distinguished by being part of the general narrative. I have reserved other more recent general comments for my concluding section, and so, in much of this overview, what I wrote in earlier times has been left to speak for itself.

### The intention

The intention behind this overview is to indicate, in relation to my development, some of what I felt and thought about specific issues, and something of how I thought I might deal with them.

### Learning through experience

Not surprisingly I feel I would now deal differently with some of those issues, if they were to arise now, and so, to some extent, this overview is a record of some of my learning through experience.

### Interest in philosophy

My interest in philosophy, which was acquired during my training as a teacher, led eventually to this enquiry which seems to have resulted in useful developments in my thinking. This coincided with a significant period of change in the school, beginning with the arrival of a new headmaster.

### Official and unofficial involvement in issues

During this period I found myself officially, as staff representative and member of the development and curriculum committees, involved with issues. Unofficially I was much concerned that the school should continue to develop successfully, remain strong, and maintain good standards throughout. I found myself involved in conflicts and concerns. Initially I felt well equipped to cope with these, but I now feel this was not so much the case. As a result of my enquiry and experience I now feel better able to deal with, or, if not, tolerate living through, such issues. I think that neither the experience nor the academic study alone could have facilitated my reaching this position,

but, of course, I cannot be certain about this.

### Change in me

As my development has occurred simultaneously with my involvement in development in the school, this overview may evidence some change in me.

### Disruption

This overview is not a continuous account or a diary of events. This is partly because the extent of my involvement in the school has meant that the only time available to me to collect my thoughts has been during the annual summer holidays. In addition the demands on my time have recently increased further. As I relate in this overview, because the school had a temporary financial difficulty in 1985, I then took over, on request, the management of its ninety acre estate, much of which is woodland. The storms of October 16th 1987 and January 25th 1991 caused extensive damage which inevitably has resulted in much extra work. In addition to this my home was flooded by an exceptionally high tide on December 16th 1989. Hence, if this overview seems disjointed it may be because my life has recently been to some extent disrupted.

### Overview

#### Philosophy of education

In 1974 I started a course in the philosophy of education as part of my training. My reading included Plato, Peters and Hirst, Rousseau, Emmet and Russell.

In 1976 I began teaching.

In 1978 my interest in philosophy was revived by

B.B.C. Television's broadcasts and book Men of Ideas by Bryan Magee. This provided an introduction to, among many others, Wittgenstein and Ayer.

I was disappointed by Ayer's saying that he thought philosophy was generally irrelevant to everyday life.

### Philosophy and educating

In December 1981 I first met Mr. W.M. Brookes who, among other things, suggested I thought in terms of philosophy and educating, as opposed to the philosophy of education: the use of the gerund here significantly implying an on going process which could be very local, or more general. He suggested I read various philosophers and looked for tools for thought which seemed, according to my own interpretation, useful to me. Mr. Brookes was later to introduce me to the work of R.G. Collingwood.

### Extraordinary meeting of governors, headmasters and staff of the school

During November 1981 there was an extraordinary meeting of governors, headmasters and staff to discuss the way forward for the school, and for the governors to inform the staff of the sort of man for whom they were looking to become the next headmaster in September 1983.

Three governors addressed the staff. Each of them spent much time praising the school. The meeting seemed to me to be degenerating in to an exercise in self adulation, and so, having been silent for the first hour, I asked if any of the governors present could make any constructive criticisms of the school. At this the headmaster of Bryanston said he thought we

ought to get more scholarships. There was general agreement that we ought to strive for more excellence, but our headmaster said that the achievement of greater excellence in specialities would be very hard for us because our time was so fully occupied with a multiplicity of diverse activities. He said we would probably compete better if we continued to do what made us different.

Since November 1981 we have made no change in policy in order to try to win more scholarships.

### Evangelical issue

#### **First Action**

The first action I took regarding an aspect of the school's functioning which was outside the scope of my job was that concerning what some of the staff, including I, saw as a movement towards an undesirable evangelical dominance amongst members of the board of governors.

#### **Correspondence and Extraordinary Staff Meeting**

This action originated in some correspondence between one of the governors and me in 1979. Then, in 1981, I instigated an extraordinary staff meeting about religion in the school. At that meeting the headmaster said that the governors would probably like the school to be more overtly Christian. I said that if the governors held specific aims for change, then they ought to say what these were, I can see now that there was no reason to expect that they would feel obliged to do so. I discuss this more fully in Chapter 15.

## **New Headmaster**

In March 1982 we heard our new headmaster had been appointed. Soon afterwards our director of music told us he had met someone who had said that our headmaster-to-be was ardently evangelical.

## **Lengthy Correspondence**

Later in March 1982 I opened what turned out to be a lengthy correspondence with the then chairman of the governors about the evangelical issue. I wrote complaining about what I saw as an increasing domination of the school by the evangelicals.

## **Meeting in June 1982**

In June 1982 I had a meeting with the chairman of the governors, our director of music and an evangelical member of staff to discuss the issues I had raised in my letter. I refer to this meeting and subsequent correspondence in my chapter on the evangelical question, Chapter 15.

## **Discipline**

During the Summer of 1981 many members of staff began to raise concerns about discipline in the school. Since September 1979, when there had been a large - at least six in number - influx of new staff, there had been many complaints about discipline, largely from the newcomers, aimed at the headmaster. It was decided to call an extraordinary staff meeting to be held just before the beginning of the autumn term in 1981. I refer to my action in relation to this and ensuing developments, in a separate chapter on discipline and the senior master, Chapter 16.

## Philosophy and education

In August 1981 I decided to try to pursue a serious enquiry relating philosophy to education. As part of my training I had read Plato's Republic, E.R. Emmet's Learning to Philosophise, and R.S. Peters's Ethics and Education. Out of interest I had also read A.J. Ayer's Central Questions of Philosophy, and Language Truth and Logic. I felt I had been influenced by these books.

During August of 1981 I tried to find books which would widen my knowledge of philosophy, and, in conjunction with what I had already read, help give me some ideas for some research related to philosophy. My choice of books was influenced by both my previous reading and my regard for the analytical approaches of Ayer and Peters in particular. The books I read are listed below:

### **The Books**

Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Education	Joe Park Macmillan
Since Socrates (studies in the history of Western educational thought)	H.J.Parkinson Longman
A Hundred Years of Philosophy	Passmore
Research Perspectives in Education	Editor William Taylor
Philosophy and Educational Research	J.Wilson
On Education	Bertrand Russell

The Educational Innovators  
Progressive Schools (1881-1967) W.A.C. Stewart

Ethics and Education R.S. Peters

The Central Questions of  
Philosophy A.J. Ayer

Bertrand Russell on Education B. Russell

Philosophy Made Simple Popkin and Stroll

Dictionary of Philosophy Pan Reference

### **My Knowledge Increased a Little**

My knowledge increased a little but I still had no idea how I might apply it to an enquiry.

### **Meeting with W.M. Brookes**

In Dec. 1981 I met Mr. W.M. Brookes who suggested I wrote a paper about the concerns I had. This I did, but for some reason I was then reluctant to write about my local context. I wrote about concerns I had with the educational system as a whole. This did not get me very far as I was concerning myself with action which was necessarily largely very remote from me. However, my discussions with Mr. Brookes and his suggestion that I read R.G. Collingwood's Autobiography and C.H. Waddington's Tools for Thought helped me towards a more effective approach.

### **Philosophy and educating**

At this time I became aware, of the advantage of

considering philosophy and educating as opposed to the philosophy of education.

### **Collingwood and Ayer**

In October 1983 I read R.G. Collingwood's Essay on Metaphysics. This I found difficult initially, mainly, I think, because I had previously been influenced by positivist thinking which made me want to resist metaphysics. I was then not aware that there were various uses of the word metaphysics. I was intrigued by Collingwood's argument against Ayer's attempt, in his book Language Truth and Logic, to eliminate metaphysics. I had previously read and heard Ayer, and had been influenced by him, and so I was motivated towards trying to sort out for myself some of the arguments that seemed to have arisen between these two prominent thinkers. I include a separate chapter on this topic in Part II on the development in my thinking.

### **Knowledge Depends on its Context**

The Collingwood and Ayer argument provided useful added interest and gave me - once I felt more comfortable with Collingwood's metaphysics as a result of seeing that it really accommodated positivist thinking within it, as opposed to eliminating it - an important awareness that knowledge depends on its context. This lead me to an understanding that enquiry could usefully be made into a local context, and it helped me understand why I had found it hard to apply the ideas gained from the mainly very theoretical and hence decontextualised reading I had done until then.

## **Mr. Brookes's Seminars**

However, it was not until Oct. 1984 when I began to attend regular seminars given by Mr. Brookes that my thinking developed to a point where I felt I could usefully examine my own thought and action in my local context.

### **A New Headmaster Appointed**

#### **Strong Reaction**

A new headmaster had been appointed in 1982 and taken office in 1983. He had come from a much smaller school where he was well established, almost, if not, the longest serving member. When he arrived he met strong reaction from some staff and some parents, almost immediately.

#### **Lack of Confidence**

Whereas at his previous school he had been, apparently, dominant and domineering, he appeared to lack confidence and to be unassertive in his new appointment. He seemed to find difficulty with the larger scale and greater complexity of his new school.

#### **Pupil Numbers Fell**

His popularity was not enhanced by the fact that, over his first two years, pupil members fell to such an extent that one total and two partial staff redundancies were made. The school had a previous history of healthy financial surpluses and a reputation for innovative development. The obvious lack of funds and the apparent lack of inspiration from the headmaster was a further source of concern and, no doubt a context marker for conflict between the headmaster and staff,

and headmaster and parents.

### **Climate of Conflict Further Sensitised**

The climate of conflict was further sensitised by the fact that the headmaster's wife seemed capable of upsetting almost all the staff, and creating lasting tension. Added to this, she was seen by the staff as making little contribution to the life of the school, and providing little support for her husband, though she was paid a salary for fulfilling this role.

### **Pre-prep.**

Further, it was a clearly stated intention of the new headmaster and his wife that the school would open a pre-preparatory department in September 1985 and that she was to be in charge of this. Many staff and parents saw the pre-prep. as bound to change the character of the school irrevocably and detrimentally, so this was a further context marker for the unpopularity of, and conflict with, the new headmaster and his wife.

### **Staff representative**

#### **Poor Communication**

I had become the staff representative to the headmaster and governors in 1982 when the previous holder of this position left. I had suggested that someone should take on the role because I believed that problems arose often quite unnecessarily as a result of poor communication between, usually, the headmaster and assistant headmaster on one side, and the staff on the other.

I believed that if we could communicate more effi-

ciently, the organisation would function more cohesively and hence more effectively.

The staff asked me to do the job, partly, I think, because I had shown myself prepared to take on some of those who had more official power in the organisation, when I drew attention to the growing concern over the evangelical question. I was willing to become staff representative not only because, having suggested someone should, I felt some obligation to do so, but also because I felt I could perform a useful function.

#### **Evangelical Issue and the Appointment of the New Headmaster**

My exchanges with the chairman of the board of governors over the evangelical question had developed, at one stage, partly in to a discussion of what sort of person the governors had been looking for when they appointed the new headmaster.

The new headmaster made no mention of the issue to me until, after almost two years, he was asked by the chairman to provide me with a copy of the school charter for the staff to see. He then said he thought I had been threatening him. I was surprised by this because I did not regard myself as powerful enough to threaten him, so I did my best to convince him that it was not my intention to do so. I repeated this in a letter, which I shall mention later, written to him shortly afterwards.

#### **The New Headmaster's View of the Staff Representative**

Soon after the new headmaster was appointed, he discussed the idea of the staff representative with me. He said he was happy for me to continue but that he hoped eventually a staff representative would be un-

necessary because the staff would happily go straight to him with concerns, when they got to know him better. My view was that this would not be the case because many issues raised with me were in the form of complaint and many staff would always find it difficult to complain directly to the headmaster. His predictable response was that if members of staff were disinclined to raise issues with the headmaster then the issues could not be very important. I maintained that apparently unimportant issues could develop into significant concerns if left unrepresented.

We agreed to differ and leave things as they were for the time being. Though I have never officially ceased to be staff representative I have unofficially ceased to fulfil much of that function since the appointment of the senior master in 1986.

#### The development committee

In January 1984 I was one of two members of staff invited to join the newly forming development committee, the brief of which was to formulate building development policy for the school. I was told I had been asked to join because I was the staff representative. I accepted because I felt I should take the opportunity to represent staff views, and also to influence policy on behalf of the staff and myself. The committee consisted of four governors, the headmaster, bursar and us two members of staff.

#### Pressure and Conflict

As staff representative I frequently found myself under pressure at the centre of conflict, particularly during the new headmaster's first five often rather turbulent years.

The issues which arose during this period included: the planning of the pre-prep. from 1984 to 1987; the redundancies and general concern about finances which resulted from a fall in pupil numbers in 1984 and 1985; and a general concern about what seemed to many staff to be a lack of direction from the headmaster in 1985 and 1986.

### **Trouble Maker**

In December 1984 I began to feel I was considered by the headmaster and governors to be a trouble-maker. This was because when I met the previous headmaster in December 1984 he told me that the governor with whom I had corresponded about religion and bible reading in 1979 had asked him if he would try to stop me causing trouble. However, the previous headmaster said that from what he had heard about what was going on his sympathies were very much with the staff. When I mentioned to the present headmaster what the governor had said - this was about six months later at the height of the concern about finances - he, the headmaster, agreed that the governor had overstated the case. I assumed this was an admission on the headmaster's part that he himself had overstated the case to the governor, because, had he not done so, the governor in question would have had little or no idea about what was happening.

### **Attempts to Avert Worse Trouble**

I was not surprised to have been labelled a trouble-maker but I was annoyed because I was making a genuine attempt to help to resolve concerns by communicating staff views, in many cases in an attempt to avert worse trouble.

## **Extensive Discontent**

By the summer of 1984 there was such extensive discontent that I began to suppress some issues raised through me, because I felt the level of confrontation had reached saturation point. I tried to divert attention towards less contentious topics such as the need for bright ideas for innovative development. However, feelings were running very high: one particularly belligerent teacher said that there were then enough staff dissatisfied for the staff to say that they refused to work with the new headmaster. I agreed that there were many dissatisfied, but I did not consider that refusing to work with the headmaster was either a likely, as far as many staff were concerned, or a desirable course. Why? I thought things were bad but not so bad that they could not get better. I thought that an interacting of perceptions of things being bad had made for even worse perceptions. I did not feel so strongly against the headmaster that I wanted to do him down; I thought many others would feel the same. Aside from school issues I got on quite well with him, and so found myself in an awkward position.

## **Need to Make the New Headmaster More Comfortable But Not Complacent**

My view at the time was that we needed to make the new headmaster feel more comfortable but not contented or complacent. We needed to supplement his deficiencies by encouraging him to delegate some of the parts of his job with which he found it difficult to cope. This view was contrary to that held by a significant contingent of staff who thought we ought to try to get rid of the new headmaster. Consequently, as staff representative I had some difficulty in appearing belligerent enough to satisfy the more belligerent members of staff, but not being so belligerent that the

communication between the headmaster and me broke down. I would not have had the stomach, and I did not have the inclination for a challenge. I also felt that ultimately only a few staff would actually rebel and that the governors would support the headmaster against those who rebelled. Further, I had never taken part in or witnessed such a rebellion and had no second hand knowledge of such a thing, so what might have happened was quite unknown to me.

#### The Pre-Prep. Development: The First Attempt

The first major issue over which conflict occurred was the planning of the new pre-prep. department. During 1984 the development committee produced a plan incorporating an extension to the girls' boarding accommodation and a new pre-prep. The total cost was around £150,000. On account of the falling numbers, much concern developed amongst the staff as to how this building was to be afforded. Even the assistant headmaster, who was then not a member of the development committee, though close to the headmaster, voiced his concern to me about this proposed expenditure. At the next development committee meeting I passed on these concerns, which I also held, but the governors and headmaster were still anxious to proceed. However, at an informal meeting of the finance and general purposes committee, on 7th February 1985, it was decided to postpone the building. The accommodation for the pre-prep. and extra girls' dormitories was to be found within the existing buildings.

#### Concern About Financial Management

##### **Apparent Lack of Financial Control**

The announcement of this sudden change of policy towards a course, which to the staff had for some time

seemed inevitable in our financial position, added to the feeling that adequate financial vigilance was not being exercised.

### **New Headmaster's Extravagance**

Added to this the new headmaster and his wife were regarded by the staff as extravagant with their apparently unlimited expense account. This was partly because their life-style made a sharp contrast with the frugality of the previous headmaster, who was very wealthy in his own right and who had spent his own money on what would in many cases be regarded as perquisites, modest though they were in his case.

### **Relief**

However, the change of policy was greeted with relief. Members of staff, including me, enthusiastically set about devising plans for temporarily, at least, accommodating the proposed development within existing buildings. This I welcomed for the following reasons.

1. We were not spending a relatively very large sum on the pre-prep. which was an untested venture.
2. We were not building new accommodation while, as the result of the drop in pupil numbers, other existing accommodation was being emptied.
3. It meant that the headmaster's wife was not seen to have had entirely her own way over the starting of the pre-prep. (When what would have been record capital expenditure on the pre-prep. was originally proposed, many

staff saw it as case of a rudimentary tail wagging a fully grown dog.)

### **Redundancies**

During the early summer of 1985 more alarm about the school's finances was caused by the announcement that, because of our financial situation, the head groundsman was to be made redundant and two full-time teachers were to become part-time.

### **Prior Notice**

I knew of this before the situation was discussed in a staff meeting because I was asked to take over the supervision of the ground staff; when the headmaster asked me to do this he said that if I did not accept, the P.E. master would have to be made redundant instead of the head groundsman. I regarded it as preferable to keep a teacher and lose a groundsman so I accepted. There was of course logic in losing a teacher instead of a groundsman because the number of pupils had diminished whereas the grounds had not. However I regarded P.E as an important speciality and I saw scope for rationalisation in the grounds, and hoped for an increase in pupil numbers soon.

### **Much Criticism**

When the measures were announced in a staff meeting, much criticism was made by several staff of the way the school was being run. The fall in pupil numbers was attributed, by the staff, to parents' dissatisfaction with the new headmaster.

### **Main reason for fall in pupil number**

The main reason for the sudden drop in numbers was

really that a particularly large year group of fifty children, as opposed to the usual thirty to forty, was leaving. It was true that the number of new entrants was down and more children than usual were leaving early, but the main financial impact was made by the large but inevitable exodus of this large year group which had come to the end of its five years, the level of staffing having been generous throughout this time.

### **Abrupt Exit**

At the meeting when the measures were announced, the headmaster was clearly uncomfortable and eventually he got up and left abruptly; this did not help to instil confidence or allay concern, and most staff felt the meeting should have continued and attempts been made to make some constructive resolutions.

### **My Letter to the Headmaster**

As a result of this concern I wrote the following letter to the headmaster in order to try to establish, in the form of another meeting, a further opportunity for concerns to be aired.

Dear Headmaster,

Since last Thursday's staff meeting I have become even more aware of concern and dissatisfaction amongst most of the staff. They are concerned for the school's and their futures. They are dissatisfied with the present and proposed action. Several complained that Thursday's meeting should have continued. When it closed, many congratulated D.S. for what he had said. I firmly believe we have a number of problems, partly as a result of the followings:-

- i) the announcements of redundancies and cuts caused much alarm amongst staff, who, being inadequately informed about the financial situation, naturally feel apprehensive;
- ii) the recent cuts compounded with the eleventh hour cut-back on the pre-prep. outlay - this, thanks to the care of the staff, as the chairman of the governors said at the Spring Term development committee meeting - indicate an alarming lack of foresight and control as regards finances;
- iii) staff are concerned that not all the governors were involved in, and some did not even know about, the discussions about the recent measures;
- iv) defects in the reasoning behind some of the cuts have already been uncovered, and hence suspicion exists as to the validity of some of the others; suspicion has led to distrust;
- v) inevitably there is great concern about

reduction in numbers, particularly those caused by children leaving early;

viii)there is general support for the line D.S. and R.F. took at the last meeting, and there is a growing feeling that the school as we have known it is being eroded.

You may well feel that I should have informed you of all this in clearer and simpler language earlier. I would argue that consistently I have tried to intimate these problems, tactfully, in various ways, and that whenever I have suggested the idea of their being dissatisfaction and low morale I have been told I represent a militant minority. I can assure you I do not. I represent a strong and industrious majority which is totally loyal and devoted to the good of the school, and hence passionately committed to making it the best school in the area.

I do not wish to alarm you, and you have my sympathy. Of course we can all see there is a need to economise. The questions as to what should be cut and what should be done about our decline are at the root of the disturbance I have described. Had I not written this letter I would have felt I was letting the staff down. In fact I feel I let them down at the end of the meeting last Thursday. When you got up to see your visitors I should have asked if the problems were not serious enough to arrange another time to meet to discuss them in full. However, I could see you were upset and so I thought it better to let the matter rest temporarily. Nevertheless, I must ask if we could have an extraordinary staff meeting in order to discuss these very important issues. May I also ask if, prior to the meeting, should it take place, staff may have access to the present and recent accounts.

I should like to make it plain that I am not writing this in order to pose a threat. I am writing it to prompt action which I believe will restore much needed stability.

Yours

David

## Extra ordinary staff/governors meeting on finance.

Between writing this letter and discussing the situation with the headmaster it occurred to me that it might help to calm the situation, as well as to convey the fears of the staff to the governors, if some of the financially expert governors were to discuss the concerns with the staff. The headmaster agreed to this, when we met to discuss my letter, and it was arranged for the staff to meet the financial governors on the evening of the termly governors' meeting which was then due in about a fortnight.

Below are the thoughts I recorded on the prospect of the meeting.

### Extraordinary Staff/governors Meeting on Finance

27th June 1985

The recent cut-backs and redundancies have resulted in much concern and insecurity amongst staff. There has been a dramatic financial U-turn in the last five months, from considering borrowing £100,000 for pre-prep./girls' dormitory development in February, to three staff redundancies in May.

#### **General aim for the meeting**

To try to elicit some information about finances while remaining aware of the potential for more concern that might be created if all the facts were made known- I had some inside information from a governor who had told me we would be sailing very close to the wind financially for the next few months if not longer.

More specific aims for the meeting.

- 1) to unite governors, headmasters and staff in

a combined effort to help make the school "take off",

- 2) to establish or restore stability,
- 3) to establish greater control over spending,
- 4) to establish staff access to accounts (full and detailed).

### **Constant Vigilance Required**

I would like to see a staff finance committee to look at ways of best utilising resources.

In my view the school by its complex and diverse nature requires a high level of constant vigilance.

### **The Meeting About Finance**

#### **Not So Productive**

The meeting of staff and governors on finance was not very productive. The chairman of the finance and general purposes committee spoke for some while on how the school's income was spent in terms of percentages. He illustrated this with a pie chart but gave no actual figures. The main item of expenditure was staff salaries. After he had spoken, questions were invited. I asked if any means of reducing expense apart from redundancies had been considered. The reply was that there was no other means of cutting expense significantly.

#### **Staff Access to Accounts**

When I asked if the staff could have access to the school's accounts, I was told that the governors did not consider that this was desirable or helpful. When pressed on the apparent about-turn on the building development the governors thanked us for our care in anticipating this, but they assured us they would have

postponed the scheme anyway once they had seen the financial position on paper.

### **The Specific Aims**

As regards the more specific aims I stated for the meeting at the time:-

1. There is no way of showing increased unity.

Staff and governors had an opportunity to share concerns. Staff and governors met very little otherwise, and there is something to be said in favour of the bonds formed by discussing concerns face to face. However, staff and governors did not meet any more frequently after this meeting.

2. Some stability seemed to be restored.

Though there was dissatisfaction and frustration with the governors' evasiveness of producing real figures, there was a resignation that this was their most likely course as they would want to maintain as much power as they could by withholding as much information as possible.

There was some stability regained through the staff having the opportunity to complain about the state of affairs to a higher authority: i.e. getting outside the immediate system of the staff and headmaster.

Apart from the eleventh hour change of policy on the building development, there were no other criticisms made of the governors' financial management - it was difficult to say anything directly about the headmaster's apparently over generous expense account, because he was present - so some gain in stability was

derived from the discussion of means to a common purpose of good financial management.

3. Apart from any unsystematized tensions which might have been set up in governors, and

4. headmasters and staff, there was no other extra control over spending established. No resolutions were made to institute any further systematic control.

#### **Advisory Staff Finance Committee**

At the time I would have liked to have seen an advisory staff finance committee to advise the finance and general purposes committee and headmaster of means of utilising financial resources better. This committee would have had access to the same information as the f. and g.p. committee; short of this I would have liked to have seen at least two staff members on the f. and g.p. committee. I wanted to establish this as a means of reducing the staff's suspicion, distrust and lack of confidence in the handling of finance as well as a means of control.

#### **Comment made in 1991 on my views on finance in 1985**

#### **Staff Representation on Committees**

However, I now realise, having been one of two staff members of the development committee for six years, that having staff representation on a committee does not necessarily entail increased staff power over all that should be the business of that committee, because matters which the governors, headmasters and bursar wish to keep to themselves, they will keep to themselves.

I did not expect that staff involvement in finan-

cial management would be accepted by the governors, but it was an idea which had been suggested amongst staff many times, and the apparent crisis provided an opportunity for proposing it. Though it was unlikely that it would be granted, I felt it would be more placatory, to the staff, for me to ask for it and not get it than for me not to ask for it.

### Staff Access to Accounts

This was not granted, probably because there was a fear that staff access to the accounts would lead to much questioning of spending.

There also seemed to be a feeling amongst governors that, partly as a consequence of the immediate state of concern but also because of a longer term climate of staff dissatisfaction with the new headmaster's regime, the staff were trying to take over the running of the school; the governors were bound to resist this to maintain as much official power in the headmaster as possible, because they had just appointed him, and, therefore they were personally all the more responsible.

### **The Bursar**

The governors were known to be dissatisfied with the bursar but, again, they had appointed him. He was not officially qualified and he was regarded by many of the staff as inefficient. However, it seemed the governors preferred to try to nurse him along themselves - the chairman of the governors was the bursar of a large public school and had been personally responsible for the appointment of our bursar - and not allow the staff too much opportunity to question his practices.

Looking back, I feel that if staff had been given

access to all the accounts, difficulties might have arisen as a result of their scrutinising their colleagues' and the headmaster's salaries. However, this could probably have been avoided by some of the detail being withheld from the staff.

On the other hand, there does seem to be something to be said for all knowing one another's salaries - as I believe happens in some schools - as this exerts a tension on those with large salaries to be seen to be earning them.

### **School Involvement**

I still think some staff involvement would have been and would be useful, particularly as regards avoiding waste. This seems all the more significant as the headmaster is not as closely in touch with what goes on as his predecessor was, and he does not seem to have an eye for economy. He does not run a tight ship.

### **My comments on my letter to the headmaster**

With regard to my letter, the headmaster discussed the situation with me. He acknowledged the need to clear the air, and we agreed there should be a meeting but that the aim should be that it be entirely constructive. There was not time to hold it until after the end of term, as we were then in to the last three weeks, and we had already arranged the evening meeting with the governors. He asked me to draw up a possible agenda-with other members of staff-which he and I could then discuss.

End of Term Staff Meeting Summer 1985

Agenda (as agreed by the headmaster and me)

1. Aims and objectives of the school.
2. Standards of the children's behaviour, in particular: general tone, respect and manners.
3. Academic standards
4. Finance: how could we use our resources better: were there any suggestions of ways in which we could save or make more money.
5. Publicity: how could we publicise the school more to attract more children.
6. Future: brainstorm for wild ideas for innovative development
7. Communications between Headmaster and staff and between and within departments

My aims for the meeting were as follows:-

1. to provide an opportunity for frustrations to be aired so that dissatisfied staff went away for the holiday feeling they had said what they thought, constructively;
2. that proposals would be made for improvements in general organisation;
3. that brainstorming for ideas for future development and management would occur;
4. to provide an opportunity for staff, headmasters and governors to unite in a common purpose of making things better i.e. to fill a space which seemed to exist for a constructive reaction to some fairly destructive exchanges during the term; to show that co-operation between governors, headmaster and staff was beneficial, and hence to

provide the beginning of a greater input of information in to the system.

5. to finish the term on a mainly constructive note;
6. to make the headmaster more aware of (genuine) concerns and make him feel more aware of how members of staff felt; to make him feel that everyone had had an opportunity of saying what they wanted to say so that some of his feeling that there were seditious rumours circulating might be relieved.

### The Meeting

The meeting was attended by all the teaching staff and two of the governors. Non-teaching staff members were invited; matrons and office staff came - the maintenance staff preferred not to attend the meeting but they came to the summing up.

### **The Form of the Meeting**

We assembled and the headmaster read through the agenda and emphasised the importance of our being constructive. He suggested we split in to three groups and went to separate rooms. One group was chaired by him, another by the assistant headmaster and the other by me. The governors sat in on each group in turn.

The headmaster's wife came in my group, probably, I thought, in order to extinguish any hint of sedition that might have emerged - she need not have feared.

The following is a summary of the recommendations that emerged:

## End of Term Staff Meeting Summer 1985

Recommendations in brief.

### 1. **Aims and Objectives** regarding non-academic activities.

- a) We should maintain the overall multiplicity of activities but try to improve standards.
- b) We should aim to sow seeds early on in a pupil's career, and allow opting out and specialisation towards the end of a pupil's time.
- c) We should teach children to learn to use time.
- d) There should be a reduction in choices re. options, further up the school, in sport and hobbies.
- e) The staff should be encouraged to produce innovative ideas.
- f) What the parents want should be considered.
- g) **Academic work.**  
There should be more emphasis on academic work.

### 2. Standards of behaviour

- a) There is not enough time to insist on standards.
- b) Headmaster and staff do not back one another well enough.

- c) Prefects could have greater responsibility.
- d) Daily detention effective but did not suit everyone - a lot of "own disciplining" by individual staff going on.
- e) We should demand greetings such as "good mornings" and insist on no running in the passages.
- f) We need more adults going round the dormitories to talk to children at bed-time.

### 3. Academic Standards

- a) We need to improve.
- b) We need to offer a wider selection of possible public schools aiming for some of those with higher standards than Bryanston and Canford.
- c) We ought to have a further look at the better use of time from lunch onwards.
- d) We should relate the curriculum allotment of time to the demands of Common Entrance.
- e) Individual's coaching should be encouraged.
- f) Bursaries/scholarships should be given to children rather than parents i.e. deserving children rather than deserving parents.

### 4. Finance

- a) A good house-keeping list should be made.

- b) Expensive areas where economies might be made:-
  - i) petrol: staff cars on school business, mowers;
  - ii) duplicator;
  - iii) swimming pool heating;
  - iv) boiler for central heating, shower extractors
  
- c) Suggestions:-
  - i) line curtains;
  - ii) more insulation;
  - iii) solar heating;
  - iv) multifuel (solid) burner as auxiliary for boiler;
  - v) washing lines to reduce spin drying.

## 5. Publicity

- a) We should make contacts with the local press and free newspapers,
  
- b) We should have exhibitions in building society windows.
  
- c) We should try to find a parent who would help with public relations.
  
- d) We should have named track suits.

## 6. Ideas For the Future

We should examine needs of the area.  
We should get the community in to the school more.  
We should look at alternatives to summer camps for holiday revenue.

## 7. Communications

- a) There should be greater liaison between junior and senior school subject teachers generally, and teachers and office staff.
- b) There should be a daily, five minute, staff briefing meeting at the start of every day.

### My comments on the recommendations

These recommendations show the meeting threw up ideas for what "ought to be done" but little, if anything emerged as regards "how" improvements could be made. This is not surprising in the light of the difficulty of making changes in the functioning of a system. It is even less surprising considering the range of topics discussed and the fact that we discussed them in about one and a half hours in a state of relative fatigue after a long and busy summer term.

### My comments on the meeting in relation to my aims for it

1. Some frustrations were aired, and members of staff expressed approval of the fact that they had had the opportunity to do this.
2. Useful improvements in general organisation were not made.
3. Ideas emerged but none save for the idea of the daily staff briefing meeting has been put into effect.
4. The topics were discussed constructively, and there seemed to be a much greater degree of unity than had appeared to exist during most of the term.
5. The meeting provided an ending of term on an apparently constructive note - this was reinforced by a successful staff party in the evening.
6. As far as I could tell, the headmaster was pleased with how the meeting went, and felt better as a result.

## SOME PAPERS

During the Summer holiday of 1985 I wrote the following papers as a means of recording how I felt about certain aspects of school life and what I thought were some of the views of the staff.

August 4th 1985

Concerns which exist in the minds of some members of staff, some of the time

1. A fall in pupil numbers: there is general concern about the new regime and the presentation of the school to parents and prospective parents.
2. Poor discipline: concern throughout.
3. Academic standards: many staff feel we are not getting as high a standard in our intake as we used to do. I agree with this.
4. Finance: concern about waste of money and how money is spent generally.

My concerns about my function as the staff representative

I feel that the very critical, more militant staff need to feel that their views are represented. I feel that I have to try to satisfy them that I am representing them, when appropriate, but I think I must not represent them in such an abrasive way as to reduce the potential for communication.

**Trouble Maker**

I have been labelled a trouble maker by one of the governors, unfairly according to the headmaster, but, even so, consequently I think I must not give the impression of deliberately causing trouble, or suggesting the existence of trouble, for trouble's sake; but, I must not funk issues either; I must deal with them in my own way as a representative.

I have spent much time playing down complaints, some of which have become exaggerated and provocative and potential causes of more trouble.

I sometimes encounter a difficulty of "when is a problem?" I have to be careful not to articulate the existence of a problem when the actual concern in minds has passed.

My impression of change in some of the feeling amongst staff

It seems that a year ago there was greater discontent amongst the staff, so probably some assimilation of the new headmaster has occurred. I felt very depressed a year ago because there were so many complaints from staff about the new headmaster, but, because I did not feel accepted by the new regime, I had difficulty indicating these concerns. I have been told that I was considered a threat.

August 1985

The aims of my action as staff representative

1. To facilitate communication between headmaster, staff and, occasionally, governors to assist the working of the school.
2. To facilitate information creation and exchange to help provide potential for future development. To create opportunities and a desire for seminary discussion to create new "genetic material" for the school.
3. To enhance the possibilities of justice and, if possible, fair play in school/staff dealings (employer/employee dealings) and to provide a third party in any dispute.
4. To act as a representative of the staff, and not as a delegate, trying to put the best interests of the school as a complexity first.
5. To assist the headmaster by keeping him informed as to moods and views of staff.

Some of the difficulties faced, in my perception, by the new headmaster

1. This, his new school is considerably larger than his previous school. He seems somewhat overwhelmed by the size of the organisation.
2. He succeeded a very long established headmaster who had been virtually the founder of the school, who had a considerable reputation and who also had been somewhat unorthodox.
3. As regards discipline, the new headmaster lacked strong support from the assistant headmaster who was responsible for discipline.
4. The school had, since it was founded, been considered not to have achieved the academic standards it should.
5. There was some tension, no doubt, which resulted from my and other staff's involvement over the evangelical question.
6. He had been very dominant in his old school but he found it difficult to get control and be assertive in his new appointment.
7. His new school had a history of open discussion of school policy amongst staff. There was relative freedom of information; the previous headmaster allowed discussion to flow.
8. The parents at this, his new school are more demanding than those at his previous school, according to our new teacher of French who

followed our new headmaster from his previous school.

9. The new headmaster's approach is generally quite different from that of his predecessor. His predecessor did not assume a high profile in a domineering way, and he made a point of not setting himself up as being metaphorically at the top of a pyramid. He had a much more modest and unassuming style with the children.

The new headmaster has tried, largely unsuccessfully, to be assertive and domineering with the children; he also tried it with junior staff whom he had appointed, but he has been very circumspect in relation to the staff who were already established at the school when he arrived.

He is not naturally confident, but he tries to act as though he is.

10. Although the school had a good reputation for providing good quality care and a breadth of activity, there were well-known long-standing concerns about the school. These included concerns about discipline and academic standards, which seemed to originate partly from a lack of an expectation of maturity in behaviour from the older children. This seemed to result from the suppositional states, or assumed suppositional states of the former headmaster and the assistant headmaster.
11. The subject departments were not organised.
12. There was no provision for the supervision and guidance of the new - particularly the inexperienced - teachers.

The new headmaster seems overawed and somewhat overwhelmed by the size and complexity of his new school. His suppositions about what a headmaster is seem very different from those of his predecessor.

There has been reaction to the new headmaster from some staff who disapprove of their perception of him as someone who is without natural authority within the school but who tries to assert himself in an authoritative way.

For example: there is a clear contrast between the new headmaster's way of beginning assembly and that of his predecessor. The new headmaster walks in last, wearing a gown, and everyone stands while he walks to his seat and then says, "Good morning everybody," and the children answer, "Good morning sir" - several in quite a contemptuous way, usually. His predecessor went to his seat before or while the children were filing into the chapel, and there was no exchange of "Good mornings."

Many members of staff, including me, think that the new headmaster does not show himself round and about the school nearly enough. We feel he should get around more, as did his predecessor, first in order to know what is happening, and secondly in order to be able to do something about it if necessary.

An outline of some of the context of my work

**Problems**

There seems to be a variety of problems which exist from time to time in a variety of minds amongst staff, headmasters, governors parents and children. It seems these problems are not attended to energetically or carefully enough. The departure of the previous headmaster seems to have resulted in a considerable "vacuum."

**New headmaster**

The new headmaster took office in September 1983. He has come from a smaller and, by all accounts, simpler school.

**Previous headmaster**

The previous headmaster left a difficult space to fill. He had not enjoyed good relations with many staff but he had worked very hard and he had been good at presenting the school to prospective parents. Those members of staff who disapproved of him accepted him as the founder and previous owner, and respected him for his industry and intense involvement. He was enigmatic, charismatic, eccentric, sensitive and usually kind, though he was capable of seeming quite ruthless at times. In my action against evangelicalism my references to hypocrisy had been made with him to some extent, but by no means only him, in mind.

He seemed to live for the school. He was well informed about all its aspects. He was intelligent though humble. He was always willing to accept having

been in the wrong. He clearly indulged in self examination. He seemed very much aware of a need to keep fairly constant watch on what was happening in the school. He was, however, not generally considered to be a good headmaster by the staff. He was not considered a good headmaster in a conventional sense, mainly because of his approach to discipline,. (This I have described in my section on discipline). He was not a leader who asserted himself from a position on top of the whole system.

### **The new headmaster**

The new headmaster is not filling many of the spaces left by his predecessor. It seems that unless action is taken they will remain unfilled.

The new headmaster seems to lack the urgency required to pre-empt or instigate development. Moreover he seems to regard some of the headmaster's routine jobs, like showing prospective parents around the school, as drudgery.

He does not appear to be energetic as regards developing new projects, and he is not a good communicator. Consequently some of the more powerful staff threaten him, sometimes clearly deliberately, and this further reduces communication. He is not generally well thought of amongst staff. Of late he has shown a little more intent to be enterprising, but he has a long way to go to gain much respect. Consequently there will probably continue to be reaction which, for many staff, increases the problem, dampening motivation.

### **Morale**

Morale has been sinking fairly steadily for the

past two years now, expectations having been high at the change of headmaster. This, coupled with a fall in the number of pupils and some resultant staff redundancies, precipitated a crisis in many minds around the middle of last term (summer 1985). I have referred to this in more detail above.

#### View of the staff on how time is spent at school

##### **Discussion**

During the spring term of 1985 I arranged some discussion and proposal writing for timetable modification, because a constant complaint from staff seemed to be that we had too full, too rushed and too long a day.

There was no identifiable pay off from this exercise, but it did give the staff the opportunity to say how they thought time could be spent more profitably. Questions of priority arose, and objectives and the character of the school were discussed together with the desires and perceived needs of the parents and children. Many proposals were made, but, apparently and certainly for the time being, not much came from it. However, the exercise seemed valuable in that information was exchanged and hence some potential was created, and members of staff became more aware of how and what one another thought. The exercise also provided an input of information to the headmaster.

This sort of exercise, if limited to a specific and relatively uncontroversial topic, seems a fairly safe enterprise. People feel comfortable with it, but at the same time feel challenged to demonstrate their ideas and abilities and to think in a child-centred way about what they are doing.

Some reasons for holding these discussions:

- i) it seemed that the system, as a result of its history - the previous headmaster had encouraged and in no way suppressed discussion - could not accept suppression; it seemed the new headmaster wanted to suppress discussion because on many occasions meetings became acrimonious and threatening (for him); meetings had been acrimonious under the previous headmaster;
- ii) there was little evidence of ideas and inspiration emanating from the headmaster, and, once discussion had been opened, there seemed a genuine desire from him for help; it seemed he had been hitherto unaware of much of the complexity in which he was operating;
- iii) amongst the staff there seemed to be, in very simplified terms, a division between some who were complacently contented and others who were concerned and committed; in the reaction from each side to the other, there seemed to be energy which could and should have been channelled to better effect;
- iv) I feel that I am able to facilitate beneficial advance, which would otherwise not take place, because, unlike the headmaster I have little difficulty talking to members of staff;
- v) staff dissatisfaction with the new regime - the new headmaster's wife very much included - has resulted in large scale rejection by many members of staff of ideas - irrespective of efficacy or desirability - identifiable as emanating from it; hence, it seems that the more the ideas can be seen by the staff as coming from them, but at the same time be felt by the headmaster as coming from him, the better.

Some concerns of members of staff:

1. Many staff feel they do not have the opportunity they used to have to express their views at staff meetings. What had previously seemed a fairly high degree of freedom of information for staff, and a freedom to discuss any aspect of the school at staff meetings, had been suppressed. It seemed that the system would not tolerate this suppression.
2. There has been a suspicion amongst some staff that the new regime would like to simplify the school - to make it easier and less time consuming to run - principally by turning it into a day school. A noticeable degree of indifference on the part of the headmaster to the drop in the number of pupils has added fuel to this suspicion. Most staff feel that a simplification of the school would be disastrous because the school would lose its identity, so it seems important to try to extinguish the suspicion by showing it to be unfounded or by putting enough pressure on the headmaster to take appropriate action to ensure that it is unfounded.

Some thoughts in response to recent redundancies which were made as a result of the fall in the number of pupils

1. We have to accept economies are necessary.
2. We have been advised by the headmaster and the governors that economies can be made only through redundancies.
3. Short of any other measures we have to look at the best interests of the school and of those individuals made redundant.
4. It seems important to examine each case very carefully and to contest individual cases as far as possible in the interests of maintaining the value of all our contracts and job descriptions - they must not be lightly waived - and to achieve the best possible deals for individuals made redundant.
5. A balance has to be struck between the interests of fair treatment and the damage which confrontation between the staff as a whole on one side and the headmasters, bursar and governors, on the other, could cause.
6. I believe - perhaps erroneously - that fair play and justice are compatible with the best interests of the school.
7. We must not allow redundancy to occur without it being examined thoroughly in order to prove that it is necessary and just.

8. If unfair dismissal should pass unopposed we could all - headmasters included - become more vulnerable.
9. Should we consider pre-emptive contingency measures to try to avoid unfortunate disturbances similar to those suffered last term?
10. We all know - to use recently used phraseology - that redundancies have recently occurred simultaneously with new appointments in the pre-prep. department.

Consequently certainly one, if not both, of the present redundancies have the potential to be successfully contested.

If they pass uncontested and unquestioned by the rest of the staff, each member will probably become more vulnerable. This is because if a similar thing were to happen later on, the apathy would probably be the same.

It is interesting to speculate as to at what stage, if at any, in the progression, effective reaction from the staff as a whole would occur. Where is the balance point between apathy and reaction, and what, in the way of a social force, is required for a reaction to be effective.

My view is that the social force required is not very large but that it is almost impossible to mobilise because people fear or dislike confrontation, particularly that with those who have power over them. Hence, probably, individuals will periodically be abused.

It must be emphasised that all of us, headmasters

included, become more vulnerable if these matters pass unquestioned.

August 1985

**Self induced pressure: do we try to do too much?**

**Constant Occupation**

It seems there has been a feeling amongst some of us that the children must be occupied almost all the time, and that if they are not they will get out of control, or they will miss important opportunities. Some of us seem to feel that the staff should be occupied all the time, and, if they are not, that they are not doing their jobs properly.

**Escalation**

The children's consequent addiction to occupation and the addiction of some staff to being occupied and to occupying the children seems to create a rising spiral of activity: a sort of self-induced self perpetuating escalation, a bit like autocatalysis in chemical activity.

Less addicted or susceptible staff may be affected and induced in to unnecessarily intense activity by being made to feel their contribution is lacking if they don't join in.

Are we too concerned with doing and not concerned enough about what we actually are doing?

Should we attend to this hunger for occupation? If so: how?

What activities should a child be obliged to pursue during his or her time here, and how much of

each?

Should we scrutinise the whole curriculum more carefully, focusing more critically on particular subjects, games, matches, hobbies and other activities?

August 1985

**Development:** some rhetorical questions

**Change Inducing Evolution**

Should we consider plans for change-inducing evolution as well as change-induced evolution?

**Timetable**

Should we keep timetable modification under review? Is it not easier to change in little stages (hence easier to retract)?

**"Jumps"**

Perhaps we should practice little "jumps" in development in order to be prepared for big "jumps" and provide opportunities for spin-off as well as pay-off.

**Need to be Flexible And Plastic**

To succeed, our children have got to be able to respond to change, i.e. they have got to have enough control for their behaviour to be flexible and plastic.

**Routine**

Are we dulled by routine and the expectation of

routine?

Should we plan more surprise departures from routine? Would this make us more adaptable?

Should we all consider working on new (or different) individual skills to increase our repertoires to be more ready to adapt individually and also so that the complex organisation which is the school is more ready to adapt?

We must try to keep the old skills to do the "old", and try to learn new skills to do something new.

Just because we have tried something in the past and apparently it has not worked it does not mean it should not be tried again; the intention might not have been right and of sufficient size. The flux of time may have changed the climate/context sufficiently for "old change" to be useful.

### Information

We must increase the input of information (ideas) in to the system. What about setting up a regular seminar to try to generate ideas.

### The Staff and Some Possibilities for Development

To some extent the staff can be divided into two groups. One is a conservative, contented, uncontroversial, overtly Christian group, usually thought of as being unprogressive by the other, slightly militant but industrious and go-ahead non-Christian - or non evangelical Christian at any rate - group.

This is a great simplification: the staff could be divided in to several smaller groups with some subtle intersections. However, sticking to a crude classification, one of the apparent assumptions - or perhaps suppositions - of the militant group seems to be that the members of the other group should change, and that one of the means of getting them to change is by making them feel uncomfortable, either through direct or indirect criticism, or by being conspicuously very busy and suggesting that those who are not so are not doing their jobs properly.

[I have a personal problem related to this in that my senior colleague in the maths department spends much of his spare-out of classroom-time on games organisation. I feel, and have felt for a long time, that more time should be spent developing the maths teaching which, to me, has problems which require quiet, but considerable attention. He, however seems to regard the academic work rather as a necessary labour.

Maths departmental discussion has only occurred as a result of disturbance caused by criticism from the headmaster or parents. We have not had a departmental meeting for around five years.]

This means of changing people basically by trying

to make them feel uncomfortable is, in my view, destructive and hence mistaken, and I feel it is up to me to try to convince those with such intentions that they will not be effective. I have seen no evidence that this method is effective.

My theory is that those who choose to remain relatively insular and inert could and should be invited to consider new, profitable, activity by being offered exciting ideas and opportunities, provided they felt comfortable with them. In other words these people need to be managed more effectively. Hence, merely floating new ideas is important because of the following.

- i) They promote discourse: often if one individual offers a novel idea, others will dismiss it in a reactionary way, but some will feel challenged by the imagination being shown in the first place, and feel bound to try to out do it. This can produce profitable exchanges.
- ii) The more that ideas can be tested in a small way the better, as this increases the plasticity of the system. Discussion of change illuminates possibility, and, perhaps, impossibility, particularly in relation to where people "stand".

### **Too Much Talk and Not Enough Actions**

However, we must always be ware of the charge of too much talk and not enough action.

### Our system

My view is that our system has too much unfulfilled potential.

It is inevitably a complex system made up of smaller complex systems such as: staff affinity groups, which can themselves be broken down in to even smaller more clearly identifiable complex systems; and the individuals themselves.

Within the whole system there is a rich talent pool which could be profitably shared.

### New members of staff

We have several relatively new members of staff who need to feel able to develop within the system.

### An unconventional system?

I feel the system is unconventional in many ways - both staff and children are swift to voice criticisms - and amongst staff it has a low level of exchange of expertise. Recent newcomers have found it difficult to adapt to the system. The rush and bustle of the day has been found particularly unsettling, and this, combined with the large degree of isolation of our teachers, and poor communication between teachers, has made assimilation of newcomers in some cases much more difficult than I think is necessary.

### **Little Exchange of Ideas About Practice**

Almost invariably in this school a teacher's work is done without other adults present, and so exchange of ideas about practices is not great. Hence team teaching and more formal seminary discussion outside

staff meetings to enquire into practice would seem beneficial. However, care must be taken because individuals tend to practice within safety limits and they must not feel threatened with being pushed, too far at a time, outside them. This sort of development, therefore, needs to be handled carefully.

#### **Some Staff Benefited**

Already some staff have told me they benefited from discussion of practice, particularly with regard to discipline, at the extra ordinary staff meeting at the end of last term, summer 1985.

### ISJC Report, November 1985

In November 1985 a review visit was made by three inspectors appointed by the Independent Schools' Joint Council. A report was produced and disclosed to the staff but it was not discussed officially. The headmaster's only comment on it was that he thought it quite complimentary. I refer to the report in more detail in my chapter on academic standards.

### Pre-prep. opens, (September 1985)

The pre-prep opened, in September 1985, with twelve children initially.

### Development: Memorial Building (October 1985)

On Wednesday 2nd October 1985 a special staff meeting was held to discuss the possibility of a memorial building being erected to commemorate the school's 40th anniversary in 1988. Brief mention of this idea had been made previously, and the following suggestions had been made for consideration.

1. multipurpose (sports/arts) hall;
2. sports hall;
3. arts hall (for music, drama, painting, crafts etc.);
4. indoor swimming pool;
5. sports barn (cruder less expensive building for sports);
6. development of art craft area.

### **Concerns**

At the time, the following concerns seemed to exist amongst staff.

1. It was felt there was a need to develop but:
  - a) there was a cash shortage because the school suffered a shortage of pupils;
  - b) any development would have to be partly financed by appeal; fewer children meant fewer current parents to whom to appeal for money;
  - c) there was a feeling that it would be immoral to contemplate spending a large sum of money, so soon after redundancies had been made;
  - d) though there were several different proposals for development, the headmaster did not appear to have any carefully thought out preferences.

2. The range of conflicting proposals and the absence of a detailed vision from the headmaster had given rise to secondary concerns, for me and for other members of staff, about our approach to development.

#### The previous headmaster and development

The previous headmaster had built up the school and so he approached development from a more established and confident position. He had always discussed his proposals openly with the staff, but they tended to defer to his view. He had a reputation for instigating effective innovative development, and his judgement was well regarded. Although no one can see in to the future, he did seem to be very skilled at keeping the school abreast and sometimes ahead of current general trends in development. For example, his school was one of the first preparatory schools

- i) to have a purpose built gymnasium,
- ii) to begin doing science,
- iii) to have a purpose built science laboratory,
- iv) to have a computer room, and run computer lessons,
- v) to have a craft/technology centre.

Hence the school was well equipped because it had maintained a programme of regular development. This was thought to have been one of the reasons why the school had hitherto maintained a full complement of children.

#### The new headmaster and development

The new headmaster inevitably felt slightly responsible for the fall in the number of children. He was not confident, partly because of the numbers situation, partly because of the difficult start he had had, and partly because he was overawed by the relative enormity of the job he had taken on.

Apart from his desire to build a new pre-prep department and a necessary extension to the girls' accommodation for boarders, he was not forthcoming with other ideas for development.

I felt his lack of confidence made him appear even less creative than he actually was. He had set up the development committee, in January 1984, to discuss building development, apparently on his own initiative. Because ideas for development of the curriculum seemed scarce, another member of staff and I suggested he set up a curriculum development committee. This was an attempt to provide more input of ideas from more members of staff. It was accepted.

### The meeting of 2nd October 1985

The meeting was inconclusive as regards the direction for development, though generally more interest was shown in building something for sports rather than for music or drama. A sports building was thought to cater for more children, more of the time.

#### **Need for Development**

There were several members of staff who felt we needed to do something, though what it was, was not clear.

The head of maths said that we must not stand still. I agreed with him and said we should be considering change more regularly. I suggested that desirable change might not be a building at present but some organisational change- I was thinking of trying to improve discipline and academic standards - or it might be a curriculum change such as the introduction of craft, design and technology, or all or some of these things.

#### **Conclusion**

The headmaster ended the meeting by saying that the development committee would consider the subject again in two weeks time when it was due to meet. I suggested the staff should discuss development again in a week to try to provide the development committee with more input. This was agreed. I was glad about this as I found ideas came to me better in private when contemplating what I had heard at meetings, and that my thinking needed a period of digestion.

### The meeting a week later.

The staff met a week later to discuss development. The meeting again ended without any clear direction having been established, though there was interest in the idea of building a new sports hall, modifying the gymnasium for drama and improving the art room.

### Development committee meeting

At the development committee meeting a week later the chairman asked that the staff should consider further and that costings should be requested for the various schemes and a list of priorities should be established.

### **More Seminary Meetings**

At this meeting I again proposed that we should hold more seminary meetings at which staff could consider development and practice.

After the meeting I recorded my thoughts on development and how we approached it as follows.

#### Development

October 1985

(Multi purpose hall)

We have considered this subject in three meetings, finally at some length last Wednesday.

It has been said by the headmaster that the mood of last Wednesday's meeting was one in favour of a cultural hall and alterations to the gym and art room.

In spite of last Wednesday's concluding agreement there is still scepticism about the appropriateness of

the proposed development at this time.

It has been said that:-

- a) 40 years is too soon to commemorate - 50 years would be better;
- b) the proposed development would divert attention from more pressing matters, (such as discipline and academic standards and the need to institute craft design and technology);
- c) it would be immoral to spend a large sum of money after recent cuts and redundancies: if not immoral then inconsistent);
- d) there are other non-building developments which could be effective and relatively cheap, e.g. the introduction of CDT;
- e) we need to consider development which provides new potential;
- f) the cost of a new hall cannot be separated completely from the questions of whether we would like one, and whether we should have one.

#### **General Theory.**

A mood of a meeting only exists if we say it does. If it exists it is time related.

An agreement is often an agreeing to agree. "Agreement" is an abstract noun and can imply greater concurrence of thinking than actually exists.

Development is a deceptive word which implies remedial or beneficial change. It can imply more regulatory control than often actually exists.

Control itself often implies more regulation than

exists.

It has been said in the present context that to make money we need to spend it. Would it be more accurate to say that to make money we need to act. Is it untrue to say that we do not need to spend money to make money?

The analytical nature of our language allows us the facility to compartmentalise and institutionalise that with which we find it hard to cope.

As regards development we can not cope in that we can not predict reliably what will happen, whatever we do.

We institutionalise development.

We freeze frame blocks of time in attending to difficulties.

I believe development questions need much more thought and regular attention. I propose regular seminary meetings.

Mr. Brookes's response to this proposal of regular semianry meetings was that it could prove very difficult. He asked: "Can people tolerate it? How do they tolerate it? What is disturbing about such a proposal?" Because of his reaction I have tried to reconsider my proposal in greater depth.

## Can People Tolerate Regular Review of Change?

### My View Now 1991

#### **My Suggestions Were Not Adopted**

Although I proposed the idea of regular seminary meetings to look at practice and change, twice - once in a staff meeting and once in a development committee meeting - the idea was not taken up. Some of the reasons for this, I suggest, are as follows.

#### **Contradictory Suppositional States**

Change can be disturbing, and hence so can the consideration of change. Change entails conflict; hence discussion of change entails conflict. This takes the form of conflicts of ideas both within and between minds. The conflict of ideas between minds is often virtually irreconcilable because it originates in contradictory suppositional states about how things are, or how they work.

#### **Responsibility for Perceived Deficiencies**

Contemplation and discussion of change almost inevitably lead to an indication of perceived deficiencies, the responsibility for which can be attributed to particular individuals.

#### **Much Talk and Little Action**

Frequent discussion of change would inevitably be mainly without practical end because people would not and could not tolerate frequent change, and would not, quite rightly, think it desirable. Frequent discussion could lead to a perception of a state of much talk and little or no action to which most people would have an understandable aversion.

### **Implied Criticism**

Arranged contemplation of change implies there exist feelings that things are not as they should be, and hence it can be seen as an implied criticism of those in charge.

### **Extra Work and Vulnerable States**

Change often entails extra work and transfer to, and or passage through, a more vulnerable state, both for individuals and organisations.

Change entails moving to an unknown state and hence uncertainty.

### **The Question May Be Undecidable**

However, the question whether or not people can tolerate regular, arranged discussion of change may be undecidable, as far as my context (i.e. the school) is concerned, simply because it does not take place (apparently because those who are in a position to arrange it suppose it to be undesirable). Given this state, people's tolerance for regular discussion of development and practice can never be tested.

### **Frequency of Proposed Meetings**

When I first proposed these regular seminary meetings, I thought they should occur monthly. Two separate monthly meetings would take place: one to discuss development, including that of the curriculum, and the other to discuss practice. My theory was that the new headmaster, unlike his predecessor, lacked the practical expertise and, indeed, the intent, to advise those teachers who experienced particular difficulties in their functioning. Many of these difficulties I

regarded as arising partly from a deterioration of discipline in the school and partly as a result of certain teachers acting in such a way as to bring trouble, in the form of children's bad behaviour, upon themselves. I thought that if we were to share difficulties and practical techniques through discussion, some of the malfunctioning could be rectified.

### **What I May Have Overlooked**

As regards practice, I now suggest that in making my proposal I overlooked a common reluctance to share difficulties which seems to be based on a fear of admitting or revealing personal inadequacy.

As regards discussion of development and practice, I now suggest I overlooked the fact that members of staff would not have been willing to spend time discussing each of these once a month.

### **Hiatus**

At the time there seemed to be a hiatus as regards leadership, as the new headmaster lacked the initiative and stature of his predecessor. Hence I was fairly desperate to find ways of compensating for the spaces vacated by the previous headmaster, and turned to untried means of using input from the staff to fill some of them.

### **If It Were Routine**

However, I still believe that if discussion of development and practice occurred more often as a matter of routine - i.e. discussion of change became a permanent regularity as a result of being institutionalised - the perception of it would be less disturbing. Hence I now think that one of each type of

meeting per term as a routine would be a tolerable and desirable frequency.

#### Routine Seminary Meetings Now, September 1990

We now have far fewer seminary meetings than we had in 1985, 1986 and 1987. The development committee has met only once, as opposed to at least twice as previously, per term, and the curriculum committee has not met at all since the 26th June 1986.

#### Development committee

The development committee was reformed fairly radically after a controversy - which I describe in more detail in a separate section - over the siting of the new pre-preparatory school building, and it has functioned differently since then.

Before the reforming we used to have informal discussion between the headmaster, bursar and staff members a few days before the formal meeting at which governors would be present, but these no longer occur.

I think the informal meetings were stopped because the headmaster found himself much pressured and influenced by the staff members. Since the reform I have been the only member of staff on the committee. In the formal atmosphere I have found it much more difficult to argue against the headmaster, partly because the chairman and the other governors and the assistant headmaster seem to steer their thinking towards that of the headmaster.

#### Curriculum committee

The curriculum committee has ceased to meet, also, I think, because the headmaster and assistant head-

master wish to resist and or suppress the influence of the staff in order to retain their autonomy. They still want the ideas of the staff - these they have to absorb from the staff meetings in which very few important policy decisions are made - but they do not want to be pressurised and influenced by the staff. Further, in the last four years, curriculum matters have been very much determined by national developments associated with not only the effects of G.C.S.E on the public schools and the Common Entrance Examination, but also the introduction of the National Curriculum. Hence, curriculum change has been determined mainly as the result of influence from outside since 1986.

The implementation of the changes brought about in relation to those changes in the Common Entrance syllabus and which are in sympathy with G.C.S.E became subjects for full staff meetings and then departmental meetings. The school had no option but to follow this course because almost all its children eventually take the Common Entrance Examination.

#### **Decision To Follow The National Curriculum**

The decision that the school should follow the National Curriculum, as closely as the Common Entrance syllabus will allow, was taken by the headmaster and assistant headmaster alone in accordance with some other similar private schools. The justification for taking this course is that the public schools to which we send most of our pupils are taking similar action. The fact that this decision has not, to my knowledge, been questioned by the staff, suggests, though they have not been asked to discuss it, that they are satisfied with it.

Not all public schools are taking this course according to the assistant headmaster who is our repre-

sentative at the relevant area meetings. Some of those who claim to be more traditionally academic are apparently going to adhere to a syllabus containing more rigour and more time devoted to subjects such as Latin and Greek, in an understandable attempt to maintain their identity.

### **The Origin and Passing of the Curriculum Committee**

The curriculum committee was set up in June 1985 at the suggestion of the present senior master and me. It included the headmaster and assistant headmaster, the present senior master and his wife, who then taught in the junior part of the school, and me. Other members of staff were co-opted as and when seemed appropriate.

The senior master and I suggested the introduction of the curriculum committee as a means of facilitating input from staff as regards curriculum development.

Of particular concern to us was the fact that the assistant headmaster worked out the timetable in a way which seemed to us to disregard to some extent the interests of several subject teachers. He did confer with some teachers, but generally he found communication difficult, because some of the staff showed an obvious dislike for him. There had been complaints that he had ignored special requests regarding the timetable, and that he would often refuse to consider altering the timetable, once drafted, on the ground that much time and effort had already been spent on it.

Prior to the formation of the committee, it was the headmaster and assistant headmaster who decided, after some selective informal consultation with individual staff, the number of periods which should be allocated to each subject.

**In August 1985 I Wrote the Following About  
The Curriculum Committee.**

Before the staff meeting on Thursday 20th June some staff had mentioned the 1985/86 timetable and subject allotment of time, suggesting it should be discussed before the arrangements were finalised. It was to have been discussed at the meeting on the 20th June, but it was not.

After that meeting the senior master-to-be asked the headmaster and me if the discussion could take place later. The headmaster said that there was not time to discuss the matter in a full meeting and also he felt it would be a pity to make large changes for 1985/86 and then have to change again for 1986/87 in the light of the effects of the G.C.S.E. The senior master-to-be and I felt that the matter was always in a state of flux, and that, as a compromise, a provisional curriculum committee should be set up so that, at least, the topic could be aired. The headmaster agreed to this.

**Curriculum Committee Mentioned in Headmaster's Speech**

On Saturday 22nd June, in a speech to the parents, the headmaster mentioned that a curriculum committee had been set up as a curriculum monitoring device.

On Saturday 20th July, the curriculum committee met for the first time. The following ideas, on which it was agreed the headmasters might or might not act, emerged.

1. It would be desirable for children to begin learning computing from the age of nine as opposed to ten from September 1986 onwards.

2. We should try to cover more work in the first and second years and then gear our third and fourth year work to the eleven and twelve plus Common Entrance syllabuses respectively.
3. There should be a five minute staff briefing time at the beginning of the day, then assembly, and then a ten minute period for form teachers to see their forms.
4. In 1985/86 current affairs should become a compulsory hobby for fifth year pupils and in 1986/87 we should try to include the subject in the timetable.
5. The number of Latin lessons per form should stay at five for 1985/86 but should be reviewed for the next year with a view to dropping one lesson to make way for new subjects such as computing and design and technology.
6. We should consider reducing the number of games periods per child per week from 6 to 5 to provide time for new subjects such as computers, design technology and current affairs.
7. Departmental meetings should be encouraged.
8. The Curriculum Committee should meet immediately after the Spring Term of 1986 but it should also meet some time before then.

The staff members of the committee urged that these proposals should be discussed by the whole staff. However, it was felt that a start and some progress had been made.

## Sub-committees in general: Some thoughts, August 1985

I consider that advisory sub-committees, such as the development and curriculum committees, are a good idea for seminary purposes, but that their recommendations always should be considered by a full staff meeting.

I am aware that such committees could cause jealousy, resentment and division between members and non members so it seems important that the headmaster make it clear that the committee members are merely doing a job, and they are there to be lobbied if necessary.

We need more advanced notice of agendas for full staff meetings and sub-committees. Perhaps the procedure for sub-committees should be as follows:

- i) agenda posted at least a week in advance;
- ii) committee meets;
- iii) committee reports to a full staff meeting, inviting general comment;
- iv) time lapse for further quiet thinking;
- v) matters raised again at full staff meeting;
- vi) procedure repeated if necessary.

## **All Staff Must Feel Able to Contribute**

We are trying to get a complex system (the school) to work as effectively as possible. I feel certain that to do this satisfactorily we must try to ensure that all members of staff feel they have had the opportunity to make their contributions. At present there seems to be a feeling amongst the staff that we need to develop but that ideas for this do not seem to be forthcoming from the top. Further, it seems there is no official means by which ideas which originate from any

member of staff can be offered for consideration.

#### **Comment 1992**

Unfortunately no improvement in this state of affairs has occurred, largely, I suggest, because of an aversion on the part of the headmasters to the idea that the staff might be initiating change.

#### **Curriculum Committee 1986**

The proposed meeting at the end of the Spring Term 1986 was forgotten. Towards the end of the Summer Term 1986 the staff members of the curriculum committee tried to revive interest in the committee. The headmaster agreed there should be a meeting to make recommendations to be discussed at the end of term staff meeting. Time was short and so he asked me to suggest an agenda, which I did. I suggested we selected from the following.

1. Fitting current affairs and computing in to some games times.
2. Use of existing space in the future, taking the future of boarding in relation to the pre-prep. department in to consideration.
3. The use of existing manpower and expertise and the possibility of employing more staff or an extra student teacher.
4. The ISJC accreditation report.
5. The probable implications of G.C.S.E
6. Longer term structural plans in relation to curriculum development: could we utilise better

what we already have?

7. Time, in relation to pressure on staff and children.
8. Vision for the long term: is it enough to aim at survival?

### **The Meeting**

The meeting took place at a bad time to discuss the more theoretical topics; we were in the middle of writing reports; the assistant headmaster, who appears to be particularly averse to theoretical discussion, was quite scathing about all my suggestions for discussions, except for the first; he regarded them as too abstract to be discussed at that stage of the term; I could see his point of view. However, the rest of the committee showed more interest in the more abstract topics - there was not time to discuss them all- and it was agreed that the following topics should be proposed for discussion at the staff meetings after the end of term.

### **Proposals**

1. How to improve the attitudes of children to all activities.
2. How to rationalise time with a view to reducing pressure on staff and children.

To these ends the following proposals are put forward.

- i) Weekly grades: should they be revised with a view to embracing effort and attainment? Should more low grades be given out and these

lead to extra work to be done in detention?

- ii) Library: should it be made a silent work room to provide a silent place for work during free time?
- iii) Hobbies: should the fifth (Common Entrance) form and sixth (scholarship) form drop one or more of their four hobbies evenings in favour of catching up with work?
- iv) Summer exams: should they occur later towards the end of June not simultaneously with Common Entrance, to maintain the momentum of work for the non-leavers, and also allow the teachers to concentrate efforts on the Common Entrance candidates who take their exams nearer the beginning of June?
- v) Subject department meetings: should these be instituted and encouraged to improve co-ordination?
- vi) The programme of Summer games and matches: should this be rationalised? Should we try to maintain variety but decrease intensity in some cases, e.g. matches?

### Some achievements of the curriculum committee

I suggest the curriculum committee achieved the following.

1. It has led to a more equitable, perceived as well as actual, sharing and organisation of teaching time amongst the different subjects.
2. It helped to limit bad feeling between the assistant headmaster and other assistant teachers by providing staff input in to the development of the curriculum and the devising of the timetable.
3. It contributed to the facilitation of the introduction of Design Technology in to the timetable.

A new art teacher had taken office at the same time as the new headmaster, having been appointed by the previous headmaster (with a brief to introduce what was then called Art Craft Design Technology). The relationship between him on one side and the headmaster and his assistant on the other soon became poor. Hence there arose a situation where a desired release of potential was obstructed considerably by poor communication. The staff members of the curriculum committee did much, not only in the way of facilitating communication - partly as go-betweens - between the art teacher and headmasters, but also as regards devising a new daily timetable, including modifications in the games timetable, to provide five extra lessons per week to accommodate the extra lessons of what is now called Design Technology. We now have a full-time design and technology teacher who joined the staff in September 1990.

4. The initial suggestion of the need for a curriculum committee informed the headmaster and assistant headmaster about the staff's interest in, and concern for, the curriculum and its development.

#### After the curriculum committee

Though the curriculum committee has not met for more than four years there has been no complaint about this from members of staff, including those on the committee. This seems to be because there has not been a strong enough perception of anything for the committee to do.

There have been no further extra subjects to incorporate in the timetable. During the four years the only major policy decision which affects the curriculum has been that to adhere, as closely as the Common Entrance Examination syllabus will allow, to the National Curriculum.

In Part IV, chapter 17 I offer more detail on how I think the academic work should be organised.

Notes on significant concerns, August 1986

In August 1986 I made the notes which follow below. The staff seemed generally happier, but there were still causes for concern.

1. It has been a more stable year. Pupil numbers have increased and the financial position is now healthy.

2. Small scale building development has been possible; the pre-prep. has been accommodated for the time being. The large scale project: the cultural hall, has become a longer term development with the potential to be phased, providing a series of goals.

3. The main causes for concern include the following:

- i) a perception, amongst members of staff, that the headmaster lacks vision;
- ii) a perception amongst members of staff that the headmaster and assistant headmaster lack the desire and the will to aim at higher standards of children's behaviour and academic achievement;
- iii) academic standards themselves;
- iv) the apparently perennial problem of discipline itself; this causes much concern amongst many staff;
- v) an absence of any novel suggestion for innovation;
- vi) an anxiety amongst some staff that the school's finances are not being handled as

carefully as they might be;

vii) a concern amongst staff that the school day is becoming more and more pressured, for staff and children, and that therefore we should try to reduce the intensity of activity, while maintaining variety, though this in turn poses a dilemma of where to reduce.

#### **Staff discontent.**

The school is surviving comfortably though there is staff discontent, particularly about standards of discipline and academic achievement. There is a clear difference between the expectations of the headmaster and assistant headmaster on one side and those of many of the staff on the other.

The staff seem to feel a need to go forward. The main concerns are:

- i) how to improve academic standards;
- ii) how to improve the standard of discipline;
- iii) how to develop the school.

#### **Time**

I was still concerned with difficulties which seemed to arise in relation to time. I recorded some of my thoughts; these appear in Part II, chapter 11.

## CHAPTER 15 An issue regarding evangelicalism

Chapter 15 is a story about objections I raised about what I perceived as an unhealthy domination of the school by influential evangelicals amongst school staff and governors. I made this protest before I began my enquiry; I suggest it is an example of an application of incomplete, largely analytical and systematic thinking to a human concern which required much more sensitivity to the metaphysics and the systemic phenomena involved.

Reasons for inclusion.  
Limitations of rationalism.  
Initial supposition.  
Commonly held suppositions.  
Potential wasted.  
Abstract nouns and loosely definable concepts.  
I was wrong.  
Considerable degree of division.  
Recruitment.  
Unhealthy influence.  
I knew little about the evangelical side of the Church of England.  
My motivation.  
Reaction.  
My letter.  
The reply.  
My reply.  
The reply.  
An extraordinary staff meeting about religion in the school, July 1981.  
Exclusive Monday prayer meetings.

A letter to the chairman of the governors. p.325

My letter.  
My motives 2nd June 1982.  
Private intentions.  
My general comments on the letter, 1991.  
A reply.  
My discussion with the headmaster.  
A meeting with the chairman of the governors.  
An evangelical, colleague's response.  
A colleague's supporting letter.  
Before the meeting.  
A brief account of the relevant events leading upto a meeting of the chairman of the governors R.B., D.H., and M.W. on Wednesday 2nd June 1982.  
The meeting.  
A paper for Wednesday 2nd June 1982.  
Aims of the letter.  
What were not its aims.  
A synopsis of the suggested problem.  
The suggested attention the problem should be given.  
Some of the many criticisms and counter arguments that could be raised against my ideas.  
The meeting, continued.  
A personal view so far.  
Recommendation.

Critique.

Analysis.

My account not accepted: letter from the chairman.

My reply.

A letter to the chairman from my evangelical colleague.

The chairman's reply to my evangelical colleague.

The gist of subsequent correspondence

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The new headmaster.

A piece of history.

Achievements.

From my own point of view.

Change in my suppositions.

My recollections and views ten years hence. p.361

My inspiration.

My motivation.

Genuine desire to establish common ground.

Subsequent exchange with the chairman of the governors.

Loss of identity through establishing common ground.

Importance of separateness.

Perhaps I was more threatening than I thought.

Ignorance of the reactions of other minds.

A Report on my action in relation to a controversy over what I and other staff saw as an unhealthy imbalance in favour of an evangelical influence over the school

This was a dispute mainly between a group of non-evangelical staff on one side and the chairman of the governors, who represented the evangelical governors and evangelical staff, on the other. I include this account for several reasons.

Reasons for inclusion

It was an attempt by me, a young and inexperienced teacher, to confront part of the establishment of the school over a matter fundamental to the beliefs of many members of that establishment and crucial to the foundation of the school.

It was the first major action I took outside the explicit requirements of my job, and, though I would now handle the matter differently, it was nevertheless an attempt, albeit crude, to draw attention to what I thought was an important issue.

I began the action just over ten years ago, before I began to enquire seriously into questions about the nature of, and possible means of attending to, such issues.

As a result of my subsequent enquiry, which has included some careful thought about this issue, I feel I can now put the matter into a better philosophical and systemic perspective. Inevitably I have changed since my action, and I can say that I now disagree with much of what I did and some of what I thought. Because my action suggested not only that I held a fundamental

position partly in opposition to that of the establishment of the school, but also that I was willing to challenge the establishment, the issue has served as a potential context marker for my subsequent actions. Therefore, what I did and how I did it will most probably have affected my subsequent actions, the reactions of others to those actions, and hence the efficacy of my actions.

### **Limitations of Rationalism**

The story illuminates some of the limitations, regarding my early attempts at rationalism which emerged in my efforts to reconcile fundamental beliefs.

#### **Initial Supposition**

I began the action with the supposition that, in some cases at least, where conflicting beliefs or conflicting interpretations on the bases of those beliefs are to be found, better understanding and greater mutual tolerance between disagreeing parties can be achieved through extensive exchange of views.

#### **Commonly Held Suppositions**

It seemed that difficulties arose in exchanges of views between individuals, and between groups of individuals, in which suppositions were brought in to question. The evangelical group seemed to be fairly loosely identifiable, but it seemed that there were commonly held suppositions which amounted to belief bonds which were crucial to the stability of the individuals and the group.

## **Potential Wasted**

It was, and still is, my belief that a great amount of potential was wasted within the school as a result of a rift which was perceived by me and other non-evangelical staff to be caused by an imbalance in favour of evangelical influence. Hence, I attempted to improve the functioning of the school by drawing attention to this imbalance and rift. But, the attempt was carried out without treating the school, or the various groups within the school as systems in the light of the knowledge I now possess of systemic phenomena.

## **Abstract Nouns and Loosely Definable Concepts**

The story contains examples of difficulties which arose during the discussion of an issue in which the meaning of words, in particular abstract nouns and representations of loosely definable concepts, were concerned.

## **I Was Wrong**

My belief that the small group of us who made the initial objections would provide a nucleus around which a bigger group would form proved wrong.

## **Considerable degree of division**

After starting what has turned out to be my first teaching job in September 1976, I was soon made aware that the evangelical basis of the foundation of the school was a cause of a considerable degree of division amongst the teaching staff.

Religion had not been discussed during my interview for my job, and this seemed to have been the case with the other staff who were non-evangelical.

However, the staff as a whole maintained a proportion of about a quarter, including the headmaster and assistant headmaster, of evangelical members.

After I had begun this action the headmaster informed me that it would be very unlikely for a member of staff who was not evangelical to be appointed to a position such as senior master or assistant headmaster.

As there was a small but fairly continuous turnover of staff, including evangelicals, and the proportion of evangelicals was maintained, it seemed that the evangelicals might have been recruited in a different way from the others.

### **Recruitment**

A local evangelical governor of the school, who involved himself extraordinarily in school affairs, was known to recruit and be concerned with the appointment of some staff and governors. It was generally held by non-evangelical staff that the board of governors was becoming increasingly evangelical. This was confirmed by the school secretary, who had long-standing intimate knowledge of the school, and also by the then headmaster who, though evangelical himself, told me that the trend had caused him concern.

### **Unhealthy Influence**

When I first reacted overtly against this apparent evangelical domination, it was a reaction against what seemed to me to be an unhealthy influence exerted on the school by a group which seemed to contain an excessive proportion of rather smug, condescending and to some extent hypocritical and self centred individuals. I thought the influence unhealthy because it caused division between staff and headmasters, and a feeling

of "second class citizenship" amongst the non-evangelical staff. This resulted in friction and a significant degree of lack of co-operation, and hence the functioning of the system seemed to be adversely affected.

### **I Knew Little About the Evangelical Side of the Church of England**

I knew little of the history of the evangelical movement of the Church of England, having been educated in non-evangelical Church of England schools. However, I knew that evangelical Christians were generally considered to be more forthright in their attempts to convert others to their way of thinking, and to be more dogmatic in their preaching and teaching. I also gained the impression that they set themselves apart from the more middle of the road and the higher church members of the Church of England, and very much apart from the Roman Catholics. I was also aware that fundamentalism was characteristic of some evangelicals.

### **My Motivation**

My reaction against the evangelical group was motivated by irritation and concern. I was irritated by some of the behaviour of some of the members - both governors and staff - of the evangelical group, and I was concerned about the effects the division amongst staff seemed to have on the morale of the non-evangelical group. I was not worried that the evangelical preaching and teaching had a harmful effect on the children.

### **Reaction**

The opportunity to react arose in 1979 when the governor who involved himself in staff recruiting wrote

a letter to the local newspaper extolling the virtues of Bible reading. It was to his penultimate paragraph that I felt I could reasonably respond; it ended thus: "And how much higher would our standards be if we as a nation and as individuals were to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the word of God, which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths."

I had nothing whatsoever against Bible reading, but I felt it probably could be only a contributory factor in general improvement of all education, which it seemed to me was in fact what was required to raise standards. I thought the introduction of instruction in philosophy and philosophical thinking alongside, and related to, Bible reading incorporated in religious education, would have a greater effect. Consequently I wrote the following letter to the paper.

## My Letter

Sir,

I was interested in the letter about the value of Bible reading in your paper of July 28th 1979.

I am sure many of those who begin reading the Bible and keep it up do have much to offer as twentieth century Christians, and, no doubt, as twentieth century inhabitants of the world. I also agree with the implication that the standards - I assume the writer meant ethical standards - of many of us should be higher, but I do not agree that the reading of the Bible should be the only method prescribed for raising them.

The fact is that many people do not read the Bible and 'standards' are low and therefore those who are responsible for our initiation to a more examined life have failed.

We do indeed need more wisdom today. This could be achieved by introducing the teaching of philosophy as an essential part of the curriculum in all secondary, higher and further education. It should precede all other forms of knowledge in importance because it is itself concerned with the examination of all forms of knowledge. Perhaps it is avoided because it is difficult to do, even more difficult to teach, and disconcerting when it leads to the rigorous examination of beliefs. Perhaps also the establishment is frightened of too many people thinking too much for themselves, and perhaps the teachers are frightened of too many questions they might find hard to answer.

I am sure that if more people were initiated in to examining their lives and experiences of the world more

critically, there would be less prejudice, fewer preconceived ideas, and much more rational justification for values and therefore better values because values would be derived by a more cerebral process. It would be essential of course that the teaching should be broad and without indoctrination of any kind.

In conclusion, I agree we need more God given wisdom, but I do not agree that reading the Bible is necessarily the best and the only way it will be acquired, particularly by non christians about whom God is no less concerned. It is also well known that some of the more conspicuous Bible devotees are among the most hypocritical human beings we encounter, and this, though unjustifiably so, does nothing for recruitment to the Christian cause.

D H

### The reply

In reply I received a long and very civil letter from the governor in question. He very much stuck to his ground, though he acknowledged I had a point. His third and fourth paragraphs indicated the gist of the letter.

"Down the ages man has turned to the Bible for laws and standards and while there may be other yardsticks I maintain there is none better than the work of Almighty God, Creator and Risen Lord. Endless folk would testify to that. E.g. had the Bible not come their way, humanly speaking there would be no Lord Shaftesbury and his far reaching influence, Wilberforce and so on.

I would argue to the death that people's standards would be higher and their self discipline nobler were the Bible read more widely. That was my chief point.

### My reply

I wrote the following personal letter in reply:

Thank you so much for the trouble you took to answer my letter, which I hope offended no one. My intentions are essentially constructive, not destructive. I see no fear of crossing swords, more a case of sharing tools in a search for knowledge. Knowledge, in my view, is central to the problem of wisdom. I am delighted to prolong the correspondence to clarify my position and try and establish some common ground, which I'm sure is extensive.

Obviously I am no academic but I feel we all can be philosophers to varying degrees and I am certain the scholarly are not necessarily always the best qualified to prescribe remedies for our lack of wisdom and low standards. We ought to be able to do it for ourselves.

Your appeal for more wisdom was what caught my attention. The lack of it is, in my view, the central problem facing us today. You touched the crux of the matter when you dismissed my suggestion of philosophy by saying that the man in the street would get his mind boggled merely by the word because, you implied, modern education was poor.

I agree; modern education is in parts poor, though, paradoxically, I am partly a product of it. The question is: why is it poor? The answer lies with those who determine its nature, whether they are the electorate, their elected representatives or people to whom the responsibility has been delegated. Somewhere along the line, I suspect all along the line, values are poor because they are poorly derived. My theory is that if a philosophical way of thinking were encouraged, 'better' values would be derived by individuals independently, and then, through the machinery of democracy, education would become the priority it ought to be. I say ought because it seems that through an improvement in education - it would

have to be vast - many social and economic problems would be on the way to solving themselves.

Therefore there has to be a vast improvement in basic education, combined with an introduction to more profound thought, and then these two would probably strengthen each other by a sort of circular reinforcement process.

There are any amount of interpretations of philosophy which is a discipline concerned with itself as well as other disciplines. It has been described as: a science seeking to systematise and interpret knowledge through basic concepts of reality, validity and value; as thinking about thinking; as clarification; and, simply, as rationalised common sense, as well as in many more ways. It is concerned with the analysis and evaluation of all forms of knowledge, and hence its great value is in clarification. I believe that one of the fundamental principles of leadership is the derivation of rationally justified aims and the clarification and justification of them to those who are to be led. In my view our leaders in politics, the church, industry and education are either failing to derive their aims rationally, or failing to communicate them along with their justification, or both. I am sure that if those who led and those who are led, all had a more analytical approach to knowledge, there would be far more common ground identified and less division into dogmatic and opposing groups.

Of course we can appeal to history and find evidence to show the value of the Bible to many, but, as you say, "Bible readers have always been a minority but a crucial minority". They are still a minority, even in this country alone. I argue that more people would come, closer at any rate, to Christianity and the

Bible if philosophy were included in the curriculum, but not of course, at the exclusion of religious education. Philosophy is the only subject which attempts to clarify the nature of all other subjects and the form or forms of knowledge they contain, including empirical, symbolic, self, moral and theological knowledge and others, depending on the classification adopted. All I ask is that people should be educated to think about what they are doing, and in doing I include thinking.

I take your point about comparative religion. My reference to indoctrination, which is not a simple subject in itself, was more concerned with political indoctrination.

I hope this is constructive and not destructive. My short term aim is to see more exchange of ideas. In my view there's far more overlap between us than anything else, though, like many others I'm sure, I need more than theological grounds for my beliefs, though I accept them as contributory.

Again thank you very much for your letter. I am sorry the reply was long coming and is long winded but I'm sure we agree it's a subject worthy of thought and care.

With very best wishes  
yours sincerely

David

### The reply

In reply to the letter above I received a very brief but civil post card. In it the governor thanked me, saying my letter was all very interesting and good.

### An extraordinary staff meeting about religion in the school. July 1981.

At the end of the summer term of 1981 I instigated an extraordinary staff meeting about religion in the school.

At the meeting the headmaster said that the governors would probably like the school to be more overtly Christian. I said that if there were specific aims held, it ought to be said what they were.

### **Exclusive Monday Prayer Meetings**

The question of the exclusive Monday prayer meeting was also raised. MW, an evangelical assistant master, who organised the meetings, said that he had been told to invite only certain members of staff to attend the meetings. It seemed it was generally felt at the extraordinary meeting that if these Monday meetings were to be considered official school functions then all staff should be given the option of attending.

Consequently, at the beginning of the following term, MW put a notice on the staff board inviting any interested member of staff to attend the school Christian Fellowship meetings.

As far as I know no member of staff who had not attended before began attending as a result of this notice. A similar notice did not appear at the beginnings of subsequent terms.

A Letter to the Chairman of the Governors.

My next action regarding the evangelical question consisted of a letter I wrote in April 1982 to the then chairman of the governors of the school. I wrote this because a new headmaster had recently been appointed to take over the school in September, 1983, and one of our staff, the director of music, informed us that he had heard on good authority that the new headmaster was ardently evangelical. This rekindled my, and some of my colleagues', opposition to what we saw as an increasing evangelical domination of the school. This view was encouraged by the director of music who played the organ in chapel every Sunday and said he was becoming increasingly irritated by the growing evangelical flavour of the sermons.

As a result, I wrote the following letter to the chairman of the governors.

April 1982

My letter

Dear Chairman,

I am writing this letter because I, and many others on the staff, are perturbed about an important problem, in which our sole concern is the well-being of the children, and which needs attention.

In recent years we have become increasingly concerned about the apparent tendency of the board of governors to become more and more dominated by the so-called evangelical Christians amongst them, who appear to be increasing in numerical proportion to the extent that now, I suspect, they are in the majority. I suggest that this state of affairs has been brought about by one or two individuals who have exercised influence in a surreptitious way and whose aim is to impose their views, beliefs and ways of worship on others, through an insidious method of covert indoctrination.

You probably know my views on these matters but, in case they have escaped your attention, I'll relate briefly what relevant things I have done and said recently. Two or three years ago, in a letter to the local newspaper, Mr. M advanced the theory that generally we require more wisdom and consequently we should seek more God-given wisdom through Bible reading. I replied, through the press, acknowledging the need for more wisdom but countering the prescribed remedy with the suggestion that what we really need to cultivate and encourage is a philosophical approach to the problem of knowledge as a whole. Mr. M replied to me in a personal letter of two sides in which he made

two points, neither of which refuted my arguments but one of which supported them. I replied personally at length to elaborate and elucidate my views and subsequently I received a brief acknowledgement of agreement in a very few words on a postcard.

Since this correspondence I, and many others on the staff, have continued to be appalled by the 'smugness' hypocrisy and exclusiveness which have come to be associated with the so-called and self-named evangelical Christians in and around the school. We complained through the appropriate channel of communication, the staff representative, which position, by the way, no longer exists, and, as a result, it was decided to hold an extraordinary staff meeting, solely to discuss this particular issue.

Some interesting points, which I will summarise, arose out of this meeting. It was made clear that the school was a Christian foundation but that the present governors would probably like it to be more overtly and positively 'evangelical'. The headmaster had to refer to the assistant headmaster who gave an explanation of what this meant. It became evident that the staff prayer and Bible reading meetings had hitherto been deliberately exclusive, and it was made clear that at this school there could be no reconciliation between the evangelical Christian and someone who might adopt, say, an agnostic or humanist position, and hence there would always remain a clear division of the staff. In connection with this the headmaster mentioned a parent, a Mr. R, who had complained to the headmaster after hearing a sermon with a humanist slant in the chapel. The common confusion of religion and morality arose and a general request was made for a clear statement of the moral and religious teaching of the school. The headmaster said he would ask the chairman of the governors to talk on the subject to the staff. Unfortunately,

though there is no more fundamental an issue, the talk has not been given.

I suggest that Mr. M's inability to counter my suggestions with a cohesive argument; the exclusiveness of the Bible reading group; the suppression of, and unwillingness to reconcile with, alternative views; the absence of a talk on the moral and religious teaching of the school; and the inability or unwillingness of many of the governors' spokesmen - at the meeting of staff and governors last November - to commit themselves by saying something specific about the qualities sought in the next headmaster (except of course for the ambiguous suggestion that he should be a Christian and a man of vision) all add up to a clear indication of the very tenuous grounds on which the obtrusive religious activities in the school are justified. Hence I argue that it amounts to concealed indoctrination of an ethically indefensible nature.

I began by suggesting that there had been a gradual infiltration of the board of governors by so-called evangelical Christians (to an extent which I believe by the way to be contrary to the headmaster's wishes) and I have mentioned the steps I have taken so far in order to stimulate a response in the form of a rational justification and committal to a moral position. [Clearly the governors are obliged to make their moral position clearly known as they are engaged in the passing of ethical and moral judgements.]

I have already mentioned the increasing evangelical bias amongst the governors, but there is another equally disturbing bias. I suggest the board does not contain a balanced cross section as far as academic disciplines are concerned, there being a dearth of representatives from the less subjective disciplines and to this I attribute the preponderance of imprecise

thought and discussion at the staff/governors meeting, much of which was an insult to our intelligence.

I apologise for expounding at length but I must emphasise this is a crucial issue which under-pins our curriculum and hence causes much concern amongst the staff. I therefore request you and your board to commit yourselves by elucidating your aims and position (or positions) and its/their justification in writing. To provide something to which to react I'll outline my position, which is also the basis for my educational philosophy, briefly.

I suggest that most rational men are naturally involved in an attempt to make sense of the world and the universe. As a result they are concerned with knowledge of varying degrees of subjectivity. The more subjective an area of knowledge the more difficulty man has in defining it or even being aware of its existence. Hence there is commonly bewilderment about such subjects as the emotive and objective theories of ethics. There is great scope for confusion in such areas but I maintain that, as educators, we are obliged to initiate pupils and students to a position of awareness and thence, through observation and analysis, to a position of intellectual autonomy as far as is possible. The central aim of education, in my view, should be to initiate pupils and students to a state of being able to solve their own problems with the greatest degree of intellectual liberty and autonomy. Is this not irrefutable? Of course I acknowledge the case for the creation of an awareness of Christianity and the attendance of Christian services, but I argue that religious knowledge should be treated solely on the merits of the sort of knowledge it is.

I apologise for expounding further but I must emphasise the fact that there is a crucial and major

problem which is increasing in gravity and which needs urgent and careful attention. My intentions are entirely constructive and I have no wish to offend, though I realise some are sensitive to the discussion of this area of knowledge. Indeed several of the staff, who would not call themselves evangelical Christians, but who would regard themselves as, at least, Christian in sympathy, have been partially turned away from the Christian religion, since being at this school, as a result of the nature of the religious activity here. Clearly the well-being of the children should be our central concern, not the creation of isolated bastions of evangelical Christianity, and for this, in my view, their initiation to a state of intellectual independence and freedom is vital. With major divisions between governors, headmasters and staff we cannot serve the children best, and on this issue it is the evangelical Christians who are responsible for the division, through their lack of committal to a moral position, their lack of participation in rational discourse and their refusal to reconcile with other positions. Therefore they are responsible for the resultant diminution in educational quality and consequently something needs to be done about this unfortunate trend.

Yours sincerely,

D H

### **My motives**

I have to admit that in writing this I was as much concerned with creating an impression of myself as I was with trying to attend to the particular issue.

If I were to tackle the same issue now I certainly would not write such a letter which said so much and sounded so aggressive and probably too intellectual. My public intentions were as stated on 2nd June 1982, page 340. These were genuine but I also had private intentions which I include in the following summary.

#### **Private Intentions**

1. To indicate that there was opposition, from a considerable number of staff, to the perceived trend towards increasing evangelical dominance.
2. To indicate that there were non-evangelical staff who held carefully thought out, coherent educational philosophies which they were capable of articulating forcibly.
3. To elicit either the aims of the governors or the fact that they were unable to state their aims because they did not have any clearly thought out and articulable intentions in selecting the new headmaster.
4. To indicate to the governors and staff that I was a force to be reckoned with.
5. To gain some appreciation from my colleagues for taking on the chairman of the governors over a fundamental issue in such a way - or so I thought at the time - as demanded some intellect and courage. I thought I had the ability and courage to say things which many of my colleagues would have liked to have

said but wouldn't, mainly perhaps because most of them depended on their jobs at the school more than I did on mine, because they had families and lived in school accommodation.

6. To draw attention to what I then considered was the frailty of the evangelical case for dominating the school, on the ground that as far as I was concerned I had received no convincing refutation of my arguments in my previous correspondence (that correspondence with the governor who wrote to the local newspaper) and that that correspondence had been cut short by the evangelical party.

7. To point out that some of the staff took the view that the increasing proportion of evangelicals on the board had been engineered somewhat surreptitiously by one or two influential evangelical governors.

8. To try again to stimulate a response from the evangelicals, and to point out that previous attempts to elicit information about the evangelical nature of the school had met with no response.

9. To point out that there was a resentment, amongst some staff, of what was considered unchristian behaviour on the part of representatives of a Christian foundation, i.e. the school.

#### My general comments on the letter 1991

Reading this letter now, 1991, makes me feel ashamed that I should have been so outspoken and so dogmatic in the statement of my own case, particularly as I was arguing in favour of an approach based on more liberal thinking as well as trying to initiate discussion. However, as far as I can remember, the letter seems to say, with the exception of the additions in

the summary above, more or less what I thought at the time, though I think the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph: "Of course... the sort of knowledge it is," probably gave the impression that I was much more indifferent to religion in general, and Christianity in particular, than I was. I should have indicated a stronger allegiance to Christianity than "sympathy" and I should have made it clear that I did have a faith and belief in God. My reference to the need to treat religious knowledge "solely on the merits of the sort of knowledge it is" I feel must have indicated that I held a much more clinical and unfeeling view than was actually the case.

At the time I intended to come across as more positivistic than I really was in order to give the impression of being what I think William James meant, in his book Pragmatism, by "tough-minded;" I now feel that this was not a good way to try to initiate extended discussion.

I can now see that the letter was far too combative, critical and offensive for any members of the perceived evangelical "opposition" to feel confident that any discussion that they might enter would be amicable and constructive.

My use of expressions like "surreptitious", "insidious", "covert indoctrination", "smugness", and "hypocrisy", and my reference to the inability of my first correspondent to counter my criticism of the "tenuous grounds on which the obtrusive religious activities of the school are justified", and my criticism of the lack of breadth of disciplines amongst the governors, were all quite obviously far too aggressive.

My references to "a crucial and major problem", "major divisions" and "diminution in educational

quality" were probably overstatements to a degree, and, at any rate, subjectively based and therefore hard to quantify or demonstrate.

When in paragraph seven I wrote, "clearly ... moral judgements," I assumed the existence of a moral as opposed to a legal obligation. This obligation was by no means necessarily felt by the governors; indeed it was most unlikely that it would be felt by them. Further to this, there is no logical basis for the view that those who make ethical and moral judgements as governors of the school, should make their moral position clearly known.

Finally, my conclusion in paragraph eleven that "something needs to be done about this unfortunate trend," was ambitious in its implied expectation that something specific could and would be done in order to change the status quo. This was particularly so in the light of the inherent circularity in the system as a result of the fact that the governing board is a self perpetuating body, electing its members, and solely responsible for the appointment of the headmaster of the school. Hence, because the governing board were almost all powerful within the system, any attempt to induce them in to interaction with the explicit intention of seeking change in the board's constitution was necessarily threatening to the board; the board would be bound therefore, to obstruct such an attempt. This was eventually the case, but not before some interesting discussion took place.

#### A reply

I received a brief reply from the chairman who thanked me for my letter and said that the matters which I raised were certainly of great importance to all of us who have the well-being of children as our

primary concern. He said he would reply more fully when he had time to consult his co-governors and the headmaster. He had sent a copy of my letter, almost by return of post, to the headmaster who immediately asked to discuss the matter with me; we did so there and then.

#### My discussion with the headmaster

I was at pains to point out I had not meant to criticise or undermine the headmaster personally, and that I was sorry if I had offended him by writing the letter without his prior knowledge. He was very amicable, did not seem offended and agreed that I had indeed got a point about the underlying trend amongst the governors and that this had concerned him for several years.

However, he felt that now that the trend was established, though he regretted it, there was very little that could be done about it. He also felt that the evangelical nature of the religious side of the school was not perhaps as extreme as I had indicated, though it could become more so under a new headmaster. I thought this probably true and said so. We ended on an amicable note, agreeing that I should have a meeting with the chairman of the governors.

#### A Meeting With the Chairman of the Governors

The meeting did not take place until the 2nd June 1982. It was arranged that two other members of staff would attend. One was a representative of the evangelical side who showed interest in what I was saying, had some sympathy for my case, and saw merit in discussing it.

June 1982

In response to my letter to the chairman of the governors he had written what follows:

An evangelical colleague's response

David,

I think this statement of your philosophy and the defects in our system is very interesting, even stimulating - not to say provocative - and it deserves re-reading and a lot of discussion.

It contains much that is true and fair, and in my view a few distortions too, but I put this down to subjectivity which is the price of our humanity. No-one can be fully objective because no-one is in command of all the facts. All of which doesn't, I agree, preclude our striving after objectivity. But an important truth needs stating, which is that no-one, Christian, non-Christian or anything else, has a monopoly of truth. We are all groping our way.

I'm not prepared to say anything about personal comments you have made, but you have used some very loaded words like 'surreptitious' and 'insidious'. Can you qualify these with specific instances? Have you got evidence to the contrary that this 'infiltration' has run counter to the 'well being of the children'? How does a misguided philosophy affect us all?

I think a statement of definition is a priority, so that you and RB and DV are on the same wavelength to start with. Evangelical Christianity, humanism and indoctrination mean different things to different people. When does guidance of young minds become indoctrination? Is that how you would categorise the teaching of Bible stories in Scripture? I think plain statement would clear up a lot of misun-

derstandings, and since this school has a Christian foundation, the headmaster should make that clear to each member of staff when he/she arrives - and know the meaning of 'evangelical'!

Now to your paragraph on Educational Philosophy. This is terribly important and I think you have struck just the right note and I concur with every word of what you have written. There is no finer thing than helping someone to be himself, a lesson many adults have never learned. But what if he is dissatisfied with what he finds. Your logical and rational approach is grand until you come up against life and death issues. Then what? You can't rationalise things like 'love' and 'death'. What sense can one make of suffering? No amount of intellectual liberty and autonomy can satisfy that type of question. Faith steps in. We have to accept that human thought is bankrupt on such issues, that God alone is the sole answer. It is a humbling thought, but a glance at the universe reveals instantly that man can't solve his own problems and is clearly not in control. I don't think it is in doctrination to tell children this, in its broadest terms, without pushing them to a decision. They must see that we are human, subject to human weaknesses and far from perfect. That sort of admission is the first step to God, whether a man realises it or not.

To discuss

P2 line 24 'obtrusive religious activities'

What are these?

P3 line 19 'religious knowledge should be treated solely on the merits of the sort of knowledge it is'

Agreed! And a thorough enquiry into God and man sounds like a good basis for study. If this is God's creation, then all truth (religious, mathematical and historical) is his and to be handled accordingly

A colleague's supporting letter

The other was the director of music who was a closer friend of mine, and took a view similar to mine as regards the evangelical question; it was he who had rekindled my enthusiasm to try to do something about it.

In support of my letter to the chairman of the governors he had written the following.

May I, as one of the staff referred to in David's letter, who has been turned away from religion by the religious attitudes and activities at this school, lend my support to his admirable letter. Were it not for my impulsive nature which usually results in a tirade of aggressive emotion of a rather destructive type, I would have written myself. Indoctrination should never be imposed, however surreptitiously, under the guise of education - but that is what we have at this school. In my two years at this school I have heard more about "being a Christian" than in all the earlier parts of my life including five impressionable years as a chorister in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. And yet, in that two years I have seen very little real Christian behaviour, particularly with reference to personal problems and relationships. The pious smugness is nauseating when it is confined only to words and not deeds.

Children have enquiring minds and the exciting and awesome world of knowledge beckons. Don't ever let us do their thinking for them.

R.B.

### Before the meeting

Before the meeting I wrote a brief account of the events which had led up to it, and a paper in which I tried to clarify my intentions.

#### A brief account of the relevant events leading up to a meeting of D.V., who was the chairman of the governors, R.B., D.H., and M.W on Wednesday 2nd June 1982

During April 1982 D.H. wrote a letter about the evangelical nature of the school to the chairman of the governors who sent a copy to the headmaster. The headmaster discussed the letter with D.H., The chairman wrote briefly to D.H and indicated via the headmaster that he would be prepared to discuss the matters raised with D.H., and perhaps one other member of staff, on Wednesday 2nd June. D.H. showed a copy of his original letter to R.B. and M.W and asked them both to attend the meeting in an attempt to maintain a balance of view. On Tuesday 1st June R.B., D.H. and M.W discussed the prospect of the meeting and then D.H. attempted to clarify some points M.W. had raised about D.H's letter to the chairman, and to clarify the aims and intended consequences of that letter.

### The meeting

On Wednesday 2nd June R.B., D.H., D.V. and MW met. The headmaster declined to attend, suggesting the others might talk more freely in his absence.

The meeting began with D.H. reading a paper he had written the previous evening in an attempt to clarify his intentions.

A paper for Wednesday 2nd June 1982

In the absence of a full reply to my letter of last April and in the interest of clarity, 'openness' and fair play, here I state briefly: [1] the aims of the letter; [2] what, in case of misunderstanding, were definitely not its aims; [3] a synopsis of the suggested problem; [4] a proposal of the attention the problem requires and [5] a brief criticism of my position and suggestions.

**[1] Aims of the letter:-**

- [i] to indicate the presence of what I consider to be an important problem;
- [ii] to suggest provocatively the nature of the problem, without being academically critical, and hence;
- [iii] to stimulate a response and initiate a continuing constructive discourse and;
- [iv] to instigate remedial change beneficial to all and;
- [v] to 'head off' some foreseeable problems the headmaster elect might encounter on taking over.

**[2] What were not its Aims:-**

- [i] to remove the possibility of belief in God;
- [ii] to undermine the Christian foundation of the school;
- [iii] to offend or harm individuals or remove

their sources of comfort;

- [iv] to create an unmanageable climate for the headmaster elect.

### **[3] A synopsis of the suggested problem**

I suggest that the 'establishment' at school is becoming increasingly occupied by people who hold a range of religious positions in a way which, partly through misunderstanding, partly through an apparent reluctance to engage in open discussion, and partly through bad example, exacerbates divisions to an unnecessary and unhealthy degree.

It is unnecessary because the problem could, to a great extent, be remedied by an increase in clarification, communication, discussion and hence reconciliation of views and positions.

It is unhealthy because it results in the contribution of a large proportion of the staff being apparently underrated, and hence their motivation is diminished. They also, understandably, become resentful of the apparently greater value placed on the contribution of those who conform with the 'establishment range of positions' but who at the same time set an apparently no better, if not worse, example. The consequence is that the contribution of some of the underrated staff is less significant than it would be if there were greater cohesion.

The range of positions of the 'establishment' also implies certain moral and hence ethical standpoints which might logically be assumed to be the bases for the educational philosophy of the school, and which, therefore, need clarification

and thence reconciliation with, or, at least, relation to, the views of the rest of the staff.

**[4] The suggested attention the problem should be given**

There is a need for continuing open discussion, amongst all or chosen representatives, in order to achieve clarification and reconciliation to try to achieve, amongst other things [i] greater co-ordination and consensus over general aims; [ii] a broader less insular and less exclusive and infinitely more tolerant 'establishment' position which encourages the discussion of 'other views' [iii] open tolerance and healthy discussion of differing views'; [iv] absence of deliberately destructive, insular or exclusive positions; [v] fair valuing of the contributions of all staff, irrespective of position.

**[5] Some of the many criticisms and counter arguments that could be raised against my ideas**

[i] It is arguable that if a problem consists in the absence, rather than the presence, of something or set of conditions, the verification of this existence (if it can be described as such) or even the identification of a possible means of its verification, is difficult if not impossible.

[ii] The content of my letter to the chairman is based on unsystematically collected and collated evidence and the value judgements of one mind. It is the result of limited knowledge and thinking and probably contains an emotive element.

- [iii] The notion of 'well-being' is dependent on value judgement, and needs definition of criteria for its examination. Are 'intellectual autonomy' and 'independence' good things in themselves?
- [iv] Clarification of words is needed, especially those with emotive connotations.
- [v] The justification for my apparent intention to instigate change needs to be sought as does my assumption of a right to prescribe.
- [iv] My implicitly assumed claim to intellectual independence and autonomy needs to be questioned. If I make this claim, how do I know about myself and might not my thinking be seriously affected by my experience.

### The meeting, continued

Having read the paper D.H. then suggested a function for the meeting be derived. D.V. said he had come largely to listen. D.H. suggested that, first, the function of the meeting might be to decide whether there were problems in need of attention, and, secondly, that those present should not be drawn into too great detail and depth of discussion on particular, profound, issues at that present stage. This seemed to be agreed. D.V. said that the points which directly concerned the governors were really the only ones to which it was his brief to attend. He also said the governors were not concerned with the educational aspects of the school, though their primary function was the appointment of the headmaster. Then D.V. suggested we should attend to four central points arising from D.H's letter those being:

- (1) the suggested trend towards an evangelical bias on the board of governors;
- (2) the religious activity within the school;
- (3) the suggested division of the staff and its effect on the children and (4) the suggested imbalance of academic disciplines amongst the board of governors.

As regards (1) D.V. said that some governors might be described as prominent evangelical Christians but that there was not an increasing or unhealthy evangelical bias. He read an extract from the school's charter to indicate the school's Christian foundation.

As regards (2) it was suggested by R.B. and D.H. that the divisive elements were:-

- (i) the apparent exclusiveness and the occasionally aggressively assumed superiority of

some of the overtly nominally Christian group, and;

(ii) the fact that some members of the staff had apparently been discreetly 'labelled' and badly treated by the nominally Christian establishment, in a way apparently inconsistent with practices that might be associated with Christianity and intending Christians.

As regards (3) R.B. and D.H. suggested that (2) caused some members of staff to feel undervalued, discontented, and consequently doubtful about direction, and therefore less motivated. It was also suggested that some had felt they had been turned away from Christianity since being at the school.

MW and D.V. were concerned that there might be discontent and acknowledged that there was the suggestion of a problem, the solution of which might be aided by discussion amongst headmasters and staff.

During the meeting D.V. had emphasised he thought Christians were unable to reconcile with other positions, though he said he thought discussions of the nature proposed would be healthy and that it would not be right to ignore or suppress the issue. D.H. maintained he fore-saw progress arising from establishment of common ground through clarification and discussion. All present seemed to agree on this general conclusion.

After I had written this account of our meeting, I wrote "A personal view of the matter so far" and the "Critique", both of which follow, I left all of these to be collected by the chairman after the June governors' meeting.

A personal view of the matter so far June 1982

I maintain my suggestions in my initial letter to the chairman are justifiable for the following reasons.

- 1) My fear about the trend of the board of governors is shared, partially at least, by the headmaster and his wife, who acknowledge they have contested it themselves.
- 2) Mr V's statement, to the effect that the governors are not concerned with the educational aspects of the school but that their primary function is the appointment of the headmaster, implies a contradiction and therefore needs careful analysis and clarification, particularly in the light of the suggested trend in (1).
- 3) It appears there may be some discontent which may, perhaps, originate partially in the apparently obscure philosophical beliefs behind school policy, it may, perhaps, be divided into four categories:-
  - i) that discontent resulting from: the absence of clarification of educational philosophy; the apparent reticence of the establishment as regards the discussion of educational philosophy; and the lack of clarification of overall policy;
  - ii) that discontent resulting from unfortunate personal relationships between the staff and establishment, resulting from alleged lack of consideration or behaviour inconsistent with what may be assumed to be the ethical principles of the school;
  - iii) that discontent resulting from unfortunate

personal relationships consequential of misunderstandings through lack of clarity and poorly restrained emotions;

iv) that discontent resulting from the absence of a cogent and cohesive response, in writing, to the matters raised by me and others.

### Recommendation

As a remedy to the suggested problems I propose there should be detailed analysis and discussion of the constitution and rationale of the school, and clear specification of responsibility. This should include examination of the school's origin and charter, with particular attention to what was the intended meaning of the latter.

### **Critique**

I acknowledge the subjectivity of my views and acknowledge that the suggested problems raised are not demonstrable with simple concrete evidence. However, I maintain there is adequate suggestion of supportive evidence and that, even though I may be entirely awry, it is important the problems be raised to elicit a closer approximation to the truth.

I may be criticised for using emotive and loaded words such as 'surreptitious' and 'indoctrination'; I don't retract them; they were intentionally provocative as well as being, in my view, apt.

I may be criticised for overstating the notions of diminished motivation and well-being, - this is dependent upon individual perceptions - and, as the justification for my advancing my argument is based on these grounds, their removal would render my actions

unjustified on my grounds. However, this would not mean that all the observations I have made regarding this subject were inaccurate.

This might be resolved by discussion.

### **Analysis**

As regards my divergence from what appears the establishment range of religious positions, I may be criticised for adopting an emphatically analytical approach which seems to overlook the emotional element. The argument over religious knowledge appears - thus far - to be between an emotive, intuitive or speculative approach, and an analytical one, though the latter - in my view - embraces emotive positions. My plea for the reconciliation to, and inclusion of, an analytical position is justified on the grounds that attempts at analysis, and hence synthesis of concepts, are fundamental to thought and its communication. If it is argued that analysis may, or should, be excluded in the treatment of particular areas of thought, the question arises as to how decisions can be made as to when and where to dispense with analysis.

The foregoing can be criticised for being dependent on word usage at specific times. It is arguable I have overlooked the importance of the distinction between where there is a problem and when there is a problem. I might also have overlooked the possibility that the very fact that this argument has been allowed, by the establishment, to continue is part of a secret or subconscious educational aim.

However, word usage may be the problem and word use may be the most remedial attention that could be given to it.

**My account not accepted**

My account of the meeting of June 2nd 1982 was not accepted by the Chairman who, in a letter rejecting it, wrote the following:

8 July 1982

Dear David,

I am afraid that I have only just got around to looking at your summary of our meeting, which you kindly left for me to collect on 29th June.

Although I still share with you the firm belief that these matters are of prime importance, I fear that we have run into the danger of getting tangled up with words. And this can cause misunderstandings and differences to be aggravated which does none of us any good.

For instance, I did not say "the points which directly concerned the governors were really the only ones to which it was (my) brief to attend"-- I had no brief to attend at all, but I was anxious to point out that matters concerning differences of opinion between members of staff were primarily the Headmaster's care. I did not say "the governors were not concerned with the educational aspects of the school"-- that is absurd (even offensive); of course the governors are concerned, but my point was that not all governors are experts in education or philosophy, and I was one who was not. I did not say "Christians were unable to reconcile with other positions"-- I did however emphasise that Christian beliefs were held just as sincerely by some as other positions are held by others. Reconciliation in the sense of surrendering principles in order to reach agreement is presumably unacceptable to all sincere people, though living and working together with tolerance can and should always be a common aim.

Those are just examples of criticisms I have about your summary, but equally serious I think is the fact that so much of the substance of our discussion on 2nd

June is omitted altogether. For instance, you say that I read an extract from the school's "charter", but do not say what it contained - i.e. (in summary)

- a) that the education of all pupils shall be based on the Christian faith;
- b) that the school is associated with the evangelical tradition of the Church of England;
- c) that these primary objects shall be taken into account by the governors in every appointment of the Headmaster.

I think those constitutional requirements are important, and if you look at the advertisement and job description for the new headmaster which the governors drew up last year, you will see how carefully we stuck to them. Nor does your summary mention that a fair proportion of our time was taken up with a discussion of what is meant by a) Christian faith and b) evangelical. And the criticisms I had of some of the phrases written in your April letter do not appear either.

For all these reasons I regret that I do not accept your draft as a fair summary of our discussion. Nor do I think that these matters will ever be settled by prolonged correspondence or even minutes of meetings. Relationships surely have to be worked out in life, not in words.

At least I hope that we each now understand better the sincerity of people who hold views different from our own. That would itself be progress.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the headmaster for information.

With all good wishes

Yours sincerely

D.V.

My reply

August 1982.

Dear Chairman,

Thank you very much for your letter of the 8th July. I apologise for not replying sooner.

I am sorry you do not accept my draft as a fair summary of our discussion and I regret any offence it caused; there was none intended. I had been particularly careful that M.W and R.B should read the draft. They did - and both accepted it as being a fair account.

I am sure we must not fear, as you put it, "the danger of getting tangled up with words"; words are our predominant means of communication and, particularly as we are concerned with education and therefore the prescription for the lives of others, we must, in my view, be prepared to examine the meaning of what we are trying to do, and this inevitably involves words. As a case in point the school's "Charter" is a collection of words.

You reject a number of things which I reported that you had said; I do not intend to contest the truth or falsity of past events of which there are no tangible records other than my own, though may I say that the meaning I attempted to convey in my summary was apparently the meaning conveyed to M.W, R.B and me.

As regards my omission of the content of the extract from the school's "Charter", I accept your criticism though the detail didn't seem to me to be of paramount importance as no one was questioning its existence or challenging its validity. What was, in my view, under discussion was a particular interpretation

of the Charter by some of the influential Governors and their justification for wanting to increase the extent of the imposition of their interpretation on the school contrary to the wishes of the headmaster. Interpretation of course depends on what is meant by "(a) Christian faith and (b) evangelical" and here again I accept your criticising me for omitting their discussion. However, I must add that you suggested that different people made different interpretations and that you would have been interested to have heard what the assistant headmaster had had to say on the matter, and I'm sure we all agreed that these subjects could be more beneficially discussed as specific topics in later meetings with more people present.

Inevitably my summary was not all-inclusive and I accept your criticisms with the reservations I have mentioned. However, you did not criticise me for not mentioning that you said, when pressed on the educational philosophy you looked for in a prospective headmaster, that you knew what you wanted but could not say what it was. You did not criticise me for not mentioning that you had not understood what I meant by the problem of knowledge and a philosophical approach to knowledge. You did not criticise me for omitting that you said that Mr. M, the governor with whom I first corresponded, was rather tactless at times.

Before our discussion I had presumed that the governors were concerned with the educational aspects of the school, even though I had heard you tell the staff and governors, at a lunch, that the function of the governors was administration. This concern established, we can now consider what it means, and this, in my view, is the crucial issue. Its clarification has been, and still is, my sole aim in continuing our correspondence and discussion. Concern with education implies, to me, the holding of educational aims and it is

these that require clarification in the light of the particular Christian position of an influential group of governors. I suggest that this influence exists, in spite of what you said during our discussion, on the basis of information I have gathered from some governors, the headmaster and his wife, and one who was interviewed as a prospective candidate for the headmaster's job. Briefly this information is as follows: that the "groups" I refer to exist, that the "group" would like to see the school more strongly and overtly evangelical in their interpretation; that the "group" appears to intend to increase its own influence by rejecting individuals proposed as members of the board of governors if they do not apparently adopt a religious position compatible with that of the "group".

Clarification of aims is obligatory, in my view, if one is concerned with education, and there can be no excuse for withdrawing from discussion of education and philosophy on the grounds of being inexpert in these fields. All rational people who deal with matters of importance which affect others can and should be required to make clear what it is they are trying to do, and why and how they are doing it.

As regards your point about reconciliation, which is clearly a word in need of attention in the context in which we have used it, neither M.W, R.B nor I were using it in a sense of "surrendering principles in order to reach agreement" - in fact we are not familiar with this use of the word - but we all agree that "living and working together with tolerance can and should always be a common aim. With reference to this, I feel that a little progress has already been made as a result of our exchanges, though, may I say, I feel I have never misunderstood or even doubted the sincerity of those involved who hold views different from my own; all I question is their justification for imposing them

on others.

As you do, I think these matters will not be settled by prolonged correspondence or minutes of meetings. However, we cannot escape words, and what has been written so far could provide a basis for further discussion amongst staff and governors, if they so wish. This is what we agreed might be beneficial, during our discussion, and I believe M.W is writing to you with regard to this. You mentioned at the governors' lunch that we might meet during the holidays to discuss this further. I should be very happy to do this if you felt it would be beneficial.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the headmaster for information.

Thank you for the trouble you took in commenting on my summary.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely,

D H

A letter to the chairman from my evangelical colleague

My evangelical colleague, who wrote in response to my initial letter to the chairman of the governors, wrote the following letter to the chairman.

17th October 1982

Dear D.V

I have just re-read the D.V/D.H correspondence, and always find myself in agreement with what I've got in front of me at the time! But I would suggest that the only way forward is either or both of these:

1. A meeting between the four of us to hear what 'Christian', 'Evangelical' and 'Christian School' mean. These words are clearly a stumbling block for some, but I'm sure we shouldn't dodge them.
2. A meeting with all the governors and staff for a statement by the Board of their aims and intentions.

I have deliberately not used words like 'consensus' or discussion because that is usually the invitation to such gatherings to go round and round in circles. The risk that plain authoritative statements will deepen any divisions that may already exist is one that is, in my view, well worth taking in order to clear up woolly ideas that exist among Christians and non-Christians on the staff,

With best wishes

Yours

M W

The chairman's reply to my evangelical colleague

3rd November 1982

Dear M.W

Thank you very much for your letter of 17th October.

Having re-read the previous papers and letters on this subject, I am afraid that I do not find myself in favour of either of your suggested "ways forward" - because I am quite sure that they would not in fact lead anywhere.

The Governors have no wish to lay down hard and fast rules on these matters. Their united determination is to maintain as far as possible the present character of the school, and to fulfil the obligations specifically laid on them by the school's "charter". I think that what has been said and written so far has provided ample opportunity for all of us to express our view and concerns, and I think that the matter must rest there.

In your letter you use the term "Christian School". As Governors we have purposely avoided the use of that term officially for the school, if only because it implies that we think other schools are not Christian.

With all good wishes

yours sincerely

D.V

This was not the end of the correspondence. However the gist of the rather sporadic subsequent exchanges, which continued into October 1984, a year after the new headmaster took over, can be summarised as follows.

#### The Gist of Subsequent Correspondence

The chairman stuck to his view that there was no point in further discussion and that the obligation of the governors in appointing the new headmaster had been to adhere to the Charter. In a letter of 5th September 1984 he wrote, to me, that the course which the previous headmaster had set for the school was clearly set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association drawn up, obviously with the agreement of the previous headmaster when he made the school in to a trust. The governors were trustees of the school and were therefore legally obliged to observe the requirements of those constitutional documents. Members of staff were of course at liberty to inspect a full copy of the documents if they wished, but perhaps the sentence which was most relevant to the matters which were causing me such concern was as follows

"...the education of all pupils shall be based on the Christian faith bearing in mind the association of the school with the Evangelical tradition of the Church of England."

I asked for a copy of the Memorandum and Articles of Association to be made available. This was granted by the chairman who wrote to me saying that the documents were not of course to be copied or shown to anyone else.

These the headmaster passed on to me and for a short while they were made available for any member of staff to see.

My view then was that it was important for staff to have the opportunity to be more informed as to the foundation and constitution of the school. However, there was not much interest shown, mainly, I think, because the concern such as it was, had eased.

### The new headmaster

The new headmaster did not turn out to seem ardently evangelical, and no member of staff he has appointed could be described as being overtly evangelical, hence there has been no increase in the proportion of evangelicals between 1983 and 1991. The matter did not arise between us until he handed me the documents, over a year after taking up his appointment. He did say then that he thought I had been threatening him personally. I was at pains to point out that this was by no means the case, and this he appeared to accept quite readily and with some relief. I was glad of the opportunity to state my position.

### My Recollections and Views Ten Years Hence, 1991

Ten years hence my recollections of, and views on these exchanges are as follows.

#### **My Inspiration**

My action was inspired by my resentment of what I saw as an unjustifiable and damaging evangelical domination of the school. I was emboldened by the knowledge that several of my colleagues had similar feelings.

#### **My Motivation**

My motivation was mainly towards demonstrating my resentment, and indicating that there were positions -

other than the evangelical one—which were held by some staff who could and would articulate them forcibly. It was more a question of my saying in so many words: "here is something to think about", and, "we are not taken in by you, and we resent the evangelical domination of the school," rather than my thinking that I could actually change very much.

### **Genuine Desire to Establish Common Ground**

However, I did feel that if the evangelicals and non-evangelicals could exchange views and ideas, we could establish much common ground which would benefit the functioning of the school. My intention was not to win an argument by eliciting an agreement or submission. I knew I was corresponding with men with firmly entrenched positions.

My first correspondent was a retired headmaster of a preparatory school which, I had been reliably informed, was much more aggressively evangelical than the one in which I worked. His final response with a very brief postcard suggested to me that he did not wish to pursue the matter further.

### **Subsequent Exchanges with the Chairman of the Governors**

In subsequent exchanges with the chairman of the governors, who – I understood – was also a prominent evangelical, I experienced the same sort of eventual withdrawal from communication at a time when two other members of staff – one an evangelical – and I wanted to continue. I now realise that there was little likelihood of either governor wishing to continue discussions. Although my main intention was to do good by establishing common ground and thus lessening the division between evangelicals and non-evangelicals, I had nevertheless been critical of, and uncomplimentary to,

the evangelicals in the way I delivered what must have been a stronger challenge than I realised at the time. Hence my correspondents had good reason not to trust me, because it might have been my intention to draw them in to a more public argument in an attempt to undermine them. I think I was aware of this at the time, just as I was aware that the more each side argued the more vulnerable it would probably become.

### **Loss of Identity Through Establishing Common Ground**

However, I was not so much aware then, as I am now, of what I now see as the almost inevitable reluctance of any group of people (or its representatives), defined by certain beliefs and practices, to enter discussions in order to establish common ground with another group. The reluctance is almost inevitable, simply because in establishing common ground there is a certain loss of identity and hence a threat to the group itself.

### **Why Does an Evangelical Group Exist?**

To clarify this idea it has seemed important to consider: why the group exists as a separate unit; what the group provides for its members, and what the members provide for the group which ensures its stability.

Because I am not a member of the group, I find myself unable to answer these questions. However, I suggest there must be mutual dependence, between the group and its members, for the group to exist - however abstract much of its existence may be - as a self perpetuating system.

### **Importance of Separateness**

Although my intention was to bring the two sides

closer together, which I saw as a good thing, I overlooked the now probably obvious fact that the evangelicals would not think this a good thing because of the importance to their identity of their separateness from non-evangelicals. Also, much of what I said was pugnacious and threatening and hence perhaps bound to elicit a defensive response. This was particularly so because, from what I said, it might have seemed I was trying to offer an apparently rationally thought out but skeptical alternative position to people whose own position was necessarily based on faith which ultimately had to be accepted and was therefore not open to question. This faith seems analogous to Collingwood's idea of suppositions. I feel sure that, had I read Collingwood before tackling this issue, I would have acted differently and with more sympathy.

#### **Perhaps I was More Threatening Than I Thought**

When I was involved in the correspondence, I thought I was dealing with people who would counter my ideas with powerful intellectual arguments. The fact that this did not happen suggests that it could not have happened; if this is so, then what I did was probably much more threatening than I thought it was at the time. When I say threatening I mean apparently threatening, because I now do not believe my arguments were any stronger than those of the evangelicals; my arguments probably sounded formidable partly because they seemed rational and aggressive.

#### **Ignorance of the Possible Reactions of Other Minds**

Clearly one of my difficulties was that of not knowing how other minds would react to my actions. Perhaps I would have handled the matter better if I had obtained more information, particularly about those with whom I argued, beforehand. However, I thought at

the time that I was well enough informed, and there is of course a sense in which one will never know when one has enough information. I was not to know what the reaction to my action would be, but, in the light of the experience, I think now that I started off by saying too much which sounded both too aggressive and, probably, too intellectual.

The whole problem of the impression one makes on other minds is a very awkward one, and there must be a certain amount of trial and error involved. A major advance seems to be the acquisition of the awareness that this problem exists and that in one sense, one can not communicate, whatever one does, or does not do.

### A piece of history

Though I am now critical of what I did as regards this issue, I regard the episode as a piece of history from which I have profitably learnt lessons about myself, about the views of other people, and about how I might deal with such an issue better.

Though the specific outcomes were not far reaching, and it seemed I perpetrated some harmful misunderstandings of me - partly because, through ignorance I misunderstood myself - nevertheless it could be said that the action achieved the following.

### **Achievements**

1. Attention was drawn to the "problem" and concerned staff were aware that it was being looked at, at governors' level.
2. The "problem" was discussed at length at a governors' meeting.

3. Attention was drawn to the relevant sections of the school's charter and the charter was made available to the staff for the first time.
4. The exposure and official discussion of the "problem" may have imposed some sort of controlling climate limiting the extent to which religious practices within the school were distinctly "evangelical". Certainly since the episode there have been very few, if any, complaints from staff about the evangelical aspect of the school.

#### **From My Own point of View**

From my own point of view I feel I gained a better understanding of how I might and might not tackle another similar issue if I were to consider doing such a thing. What I learnt from the exchanges included the following:-

- a. that analysis and reason are insufficient tools for thought for tackling such sensitive and complex issues concerning human relationships and hence human functioning;
- b. that much more attention needs to be paid to the context of an issue, context markers, and ideas such as systemic stability, the escalation of conflict and schismogenesis;
- c. that there is weakness in assuming that beliefs and bases for action can always and should always be capable of being explicitly justified in words. This overlooks the inevitable existence of suppositions;
- d. that there is a weakness in assuming that the bases of the beliefs of different human beings and

groups of human beings can necessarily be analysed into concepts, on some of which there can be agreement leading to the establishing of common ground; and, that this is probably because suppositions are implicitly fundamental to beliefs, faiths and unconsciously held ideas about how things are and how they work;

- e. that there is weakness in assuming that the concepts referred to in d., if collected together, can be talked about as a unitary concept which can be considered as being at the same logical level as its parts.

#### Change in my suppositions

I discuss changes in my suppositions, which I suggest are relevant to the evangelical issue, in Part V, Chapter 19, Change in my thinking and acting.

## CHAPTER 16 Discipline

Chapter 16, 'Discipline' is a story about attempts I made before, and during, my enquiry in order to attend to concerns about discipline. I suggest this account demonstrates development from my rather limited analytical, systematic approach, towards a more sensitive combination of systems and systemic thinking which includes awareness of differing and hence conflicting metaphysical systems.

This chapter reviews some of the history of the issue, some of the concerns, and some of the, metaphysics behind them. It describes: my attempt to get outside some of the metaphysics by suggesting an idea of a senior master; my reservations about my nominee for senior master; my impressions of some of the outcomes of the introduction of the senior master; and my suggestions for how the senior master might modify his practice.

Also included is an account of a new initiative regarding discipline taken in the Spring of 1991. In this I offered, for the first time in the school, some of the theory I have acquired during my enquiry; this seemed well received by the staff, and, while it was implemented, effective. As the proposals which came out of this initiative were implemented only for a fairly short time, the chapter ends on a note of pessimism.

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**Background****Early Impressions**

This is a collection of accounts of various attempts I have made, over a period from 1981-1991, to improve the functioning in the school in regard to discipline and behaviour.

I first knew the school in 1967 when I was employed as a student teacher. I was soon aware that it was unlike most other boys'-it became co-educational in 1970-prep. schools which on the whole were traditionally fairly strict authoritarian institutions. It showed a marked contrast with the school I had attended myself, which, I had come to understand was fairly typical.

**Relationship Between Headmaster and Pupils and Staff and Pupils**

The relationship between the headmaster and pupils, and hence that between staff and pupils, was much less formal than in more traditional schools. More than once at staff meetings the headmaster said that he did not want to be a martinet. This was part of his response on the not infrequent occasions when he was criticised by a number of staff for not taking a tough enough line over discipline. He would say that he had worked previously as an assistant master in two traditional schools in each of which there had been a strict regime with regular corporal punishment. This, he conceded, had indeed made keeping discipline very much easier, but, he felt, such a regime did not allow the existence of the sort of relationship he, as headmaster, wanted with the children.

## **Complaints**

Most of the complaints that arose at that time came from individual teachers who had difficulties when alone with groups of children. The underlying concern seemed to be that generally the children had less respect for members of staff than the members of staff expected. This seemed to result - in some cases - to unacceptable levels of poor co-operation, disobedience and rudeness.

## **My Own Experience**

My own experience is that I found discipline very difficult in my first year, but I felt I learnt quite fast how to tighten up, so that my second year was much more tolerable. Since then I have felt able to function quite comfortably. Now I am fourteen years older than when I started it seems the children have a different and more respectful attitude towards me, though I don't feel I command what I think most teachers perceive as ideal respect. However, I now consider it more important for me to focus on how the children and I interact, and how they co-operate and what they achieve with me, rather than for me to become too concerned with this abstract noun "respect" which is necessarily hard to define and hence hard to quantify. Now I am older and have the benefit of my research, I am much less concerned generally about what people think of me, and I feel it better to allow any "respect" for me to be generated as a result of what I do.

## **Respect and Pragmatic Paradox**

The idea of "respect" seems to have been the basis of a powerful, probably overriding force in the discussions about discipline.

I suggest that staff on many occasions are drawn in to invoking what Watzlawick would describe as a pragmatic paradox. This they do at instances in interactions with children when they, implicitly or explicitly, demand changes of attitude - from disrespectful to respectful - from the children. Watzlawick pointed out that attitudes mainly change spontaneously and unintentionally; they are not easily changed intentionally by the holder. I refer to Watzlawick's ideas in Chapter 10 on paradox.

### **My Early Experience: An Impressive Senior Master**

In my early experience at the school, the general behaviour in the school was fairly well overseen and controlled - to some extent from a distanced position - by a particularly imposing figure who was then senior master. He was tall and dignified, formidable in appearance, had natural authority, and seemed much respected and revered by the children. He had the gift of being able to combine a consistent, authoritative distance - when interacting with the children in large numbers - with a closeness and friendliness with them in smaller groups or as individuals. No other member of staff seemed to possess that gift in anywhere near such measure. However, he once told me that not always had he held such sway over the children. When he first arrived he had had great difficulty in controlling them, and dispensed punishment marks in such quantity that a more experienced member of staff advised him that he was devaluing the currency. However, he had learnt quickly, and became such an effective school-master and disciplinarian, of a suitably progressive type in that he did not believe in corporal punishment, that after about five years he was appointed senior master. He was then in his early forties, having entered teaching late in life after a spell in business.

He was so effective as senior master that the headmaster, a small and unimposing figure, came to depend upon him-sometimes perhaps hiding behind him-though occasionally he would overrule him, and this naturally was a source of conflict. This usually resulted in the headmaster's favour, owing to the senior master's reluctance to contest issues very far with the headmaster.

The senior master was very loyal to the headmaster, but privately he would admit that on occasions he would be exasperated by him. I attributed his unwillingness to argue with the headmaster, which I regarded a somewhat incongruous weakness on his part, to his having no official qualifications, which resulted - though he was clearly strong in the school-in his feeling a sense of insecurity in relation to the bigger system of the outside world.

In spite of the senior master's competence, his jurisdiction was by no means total, and so it was the headmaster who was seen by the staff as the ultimate authority in matters of discipline. The headmaster was seen as the origin of a system which was regarded by many as being too easy-going. When the subject of discipline came up at staff meetings the discussion would usually centre around some of the staff blaming the headmaster, and the headmaster blaming them. The senior master would support the headmaster. However, though there was chronic dissatisfaction, the discontent lingered at a subcritical level most of the time until the senior master, though continuing his teaching in the school, retired from his official position.

### **The Senior Master's Replacement**

His replacement was a man of much less stature, both physically and in personality. He was not well

regarded by the majority of staff, and he had not wanted the job. He agreed to do it only on condition that it carried with it the title of assistant headmaster, as opposed to senior master, and membership of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools. Many staff assumed he was preferred for this job on account of his being the only suitably senior candidate who was also a member of the evangelical establishment. He was an intelligent and clerically efficient man who seemed to avoid confrontation wherever possible, and who was regarded as lacking the courage to voice his opinions over controversial issues.

#### **Arrival of Six New Staff**

His taking up this appointment in Sept. 1979 coincided with the arrival of six fairly strong members of staff, all of whom, one or two more vociferously than others, soon complained of difficulties with the children. They seemed to find the children disobedient and disrespectful. After two terms there was a particularly acrimonious end of term staff meeting at which one of the new staff complained that the headmaster was presiding over an undisciplined school and did not back him, the new teacher, in his attempt to maintain order.

[The headmaster's policy was to allow each member of staff to establish his own control. I agreed with this in principle, as inevitably each member of staff has to develop his or her own relationship with the children, but I thought that the headmaster was responsible for managing an overall system of support. In the paper I wrote in 1981, included below, my most important point, though it did not get across clearly, was that the headmasters should try to create an effective support system partly by means of frequent reminders to staff and children, separately. As they

did not do this, I could only assume that either they were not aware of, or they were not much troubled about the sort of concerns some of the staff had.]

### **Heated Exchange**

The headmaster was, not surprisingly, visibly angered and turned on him with some particularly strong criticism of his handling of his classes. There was a fairly heated exchange and the meeting broke up without conclusion. The two were very different characters and clearly each found the other irritating and objectionable. After the meeting the new member of staff drowned his sorrows and frustrations in whisky and then wrote a vitriolic letter, which he delivered by hand that night, to the headmaster. When telephoned by the headmaster the following morning he thought he was going to be given notice. However, the headmaster was apologetic and regretful, and invited him round to talk things over. Amicable terms were restored.

### **Dissatisfaction Continued**

Dissatisfaction over discipline continued. The familiar trend of staff blaming the headmaster and assistant headmaster, and vice versa, continued, but also staff criticised one another indirectly. Appeals were made that we should all be firmer and more consistent, and the general view seemed to be that the headmaster should lay down clearer guidelines, to staff and children, -this I think would have been helpful had it been reinforced regularly- and that he and the assistant headmaster should try to adopt a more formidable fear inducing approach towards the children in matters of discipline.

### **Sabbatical Term**

The assistant headmaster took a sabbatical term, on the strength of his long service as a member of staff, and during his absence the discipline was considered by the staff to have been well handled by a particular assistant master who might well have been considered for the post of senior master originally but for his undisguised disapproval of much of the "establishment" line of thinking. It was requested by the staff, that he should handle discipline permanently, but this was, not unexpectedly, rejected by the headmaster.

### **The Problem Came To Another Head In July 1981**

The general problem came to a sort of head again at the end of the summer term of 1981 -the 1979 intake of staff particularly were still concerned about the problem - and so it was decided to hold an extraordinary meeting on the subject at the beginning of the following autumn term. Staff were invited to contribute papers if they felt inclined. I contributed the following paper which reminds me how much my thinking was limited to an analytical approach, largely influenced by my reading of Plato, R.S. Peters and A.J. Ayer.

Some Thoughts on Discipline.

September 1981

It is unsatisfactory to consider discipline, or any other fundamental aspect of the school, without recourse to first principles. Some examples follow. First, the clarification of the concept of discipline is necessary. Distinction needs to be made between discipline as an aim and discipline as a method, which might be regarded as self discipline and externally imposed discipline respectively. The relationship between academic discipline and discipline in general behaviour is relevant here. Secondly, the clarification of the ethical (in the broad sense, religious and secular) foundation of the school needs to be considered in relation to the relevant aspects of school policy. (It might be constructive here to give a brief consideration of the school's aims in relation to 'progressive education' and the commonly found conflict between formality and informality). Thirdly, consideration is necessary of the de facto state of discipline in the school and the possible divergences from expectations of headmasters and/or staff, (i.e. is there a problem and if so, what is it?). No doubt the foregoing is incomplete and quite obvious.

My own view is that there are problems. The desire for discussion implies lack of communication of aims and their justification and hence the existence of inadequate methods. Headmasters, staff and children require an authority (whether it be God, some branch of ethics, some educational innovator, Mrs. Thatcher, Wurzel Gummidge or a consensus or whatever) to which to appeal. Consensus might be achieved by considering education broadly. Education implies change (transitive and intransitive) in behaviour, and it is arguable that it could be regarded as being partially

the encouragement of an evolution from informality to formality. The conflict between these two is a manifestation of the problem of communication. We all have personal notions of criteria of satisfactory behaviour, and an inkling of the criteria of others, but lack of a clear consensus precludes adequate justification. As regards our aims it is the formalities which need clarification, consensus and communication. (Behaviour at table is an obvious area where this is required). As regards our methods it has been said that good behaviour can be taught and caught. Hence we need much more frequent insistence on a few principles, and good examples set by headmasters and staff. The staff and pupils (separately) need frequent, often emphatic reminders of important principles. Headmasters and staff need to be more mindful of the formalities required in their own behaviour, language and dress, to earn informal respect, but there is also a need to emphasise initial formal respect. (No doubt the meaning of the word respect needs to be considered).

Apparently it is a principle at this school that members of staff have to earn the respect of the children. Clearly lasting respect has to be earned, but the headmasters and staff could and should do more to encourage formal respect for one another. (Formal respect is a matter of common courtesy derived from consideration and respect for persons). Obviously all should try to behave in a manner worthy of respect, but lack of formal respect, amongst children and staff, leads to unnecessary inefficiency and suffering, at considerable cost.

The cost is measured in terms of wasted educational opportunity. There is far too much waste. The remedies are simple but they require effort and courage on the part of headmasters and staff alike. We are all fallible and we hence need an authority in a working

consensus. For too long the headmasters and staff have been divided by lack of communication, intolerance, prejudice and, I regret to say, by an apparent jealousy and mutual distrust. Communication is the key factor. Clear definition of criteria and principles is essential; withholding them precludes constructive discussion and leads to sub-standard education.

It is a privilege to be involved in education, but to educate satisfactorily is exceedingly difficult and requires profound thought, great skill and a lot of effort. Discipline is indispensable, and, in achieving discipline, formality is instrumental.

The formalities of life in general are being continuously eroded, often, perhaps, because they seem old fashioned and pedantic and have no obvious convincing justification, there being no absolutes to which to appeal. Maintenance of some degree of formality is crucial to the maintenance of civilisation. More courageous and precise thought is needed to clarify and justify principles. More frequent and emphatic insistence on these principles is necessary in order to communicate them adequately. Progress will not occur without concessions and compromise.

### My Comments of 1990 on My Paper of 1981

No one else had written anything. At the meeting the headmaster drew attention to my paper, quoted bits of it, and invited members of staff to read it.

The meeting took the usual course of staff appealing to each other to be clearer and more consistent in order that a greater commonality of standard might exist, and that the children would know where they stood and how far they could go.

The point of my paper had been primarily to indicate two basic components. One consisted of what I thought were some relevant principles which might have provided a useful basis, given that the desired intention and change of practice by the headmasters and staff would be forthcoming. The other was the need, as I saw it, for the headmaster to make more frequent reference to these principles in order to keep them further to the front of the minds of staff and children so that the staff could refer to them as justification.

#### **Some Value**

I still think my suggestions had value in as much as they drew attention to relevant concepts, and that making them was probably as much as I could have done at the time.

#### **Need for Authority**

I made reference to a need for authority because it seemed that the headmaster lacked the confidence to elaborate on his disciplinary theory publicly. This was perhaps not surprising considering his policies were different from those of traditional preparatory schools and hence likely to be in conflict with those

of members of our staff who had taught, and, or, had been pupils, in more traditional systems. Hence, given that his policies were what they were, it seemed that if their bases were communicated more clearly to the staff, this might facilitate the staff's being more sympathetic with them, and consequently they might have been more inclined to put them in to practice. I realised differences of opinion and hence divergences of expectation would remain, but I thought that a working consensus might have been achieved, and some commonly held principles might have been identified which could have been the basis for regular reminders.

### **Similarities With My Views on the Evangelical Issue**

This idea that greater discussion would clarify principles and assist in standardising practice was similar to that behind my action concerning the evangelical influences on the school. As regards both these issues, it now seems that I was wrong and that the more discussion there was, the more differences of view emerged.

### **Differences in Views**

It appeared that differences of individuals' view in both issues were perpetuated because each individual possessed a system of suppositional states peculiar to him or her, some of which were contrary to those of some other individuals involved. Resolution of many of the differences was practically improbable because there was no commonly held metaphysical system like the one in my mathematical example in my section on metaphysics. Therefore, I now suggest that because the headmaster was not already instigating the action I recommended, it was unlikely that he would start to do so and, more importantly, continue doing so as a result of what I wrote.

## **Formal and Informal Respect**

I still think a distinction between formal and informal respect was worth making because the demonstration of formal respect is something which can be taught. How much it is taught is clearly dependent on the nature of the relevant system, which includes the behaviour of all the staff and headmasters. I am well aware that genuine respect has to be earned by teachers because it is dependent on what is, partly at least, an involuntary mental state on the part of the one who respects. But, I suggest that the existence of formal respect can facilitate the growth of informal respect. This is because formal respect allows the one respected more chance to prove his worthiness of informal respect.

### **Respect**

I suggest that the whole notion of respect is a particularly important factor in the discipline issue because their perception of the respect the children have for them seems to be a primary concern for many members of staff. This appears to be particularly significant in relation to new, and especially the younger, members of staff.

### **Respect and Difficulties in Punishing Children**

I also suggest that the degree of respect was less than it might have been as a result of the difficulty staff had in punishing children. A frequent complaint from members of staff was that there were really no punishments they could give between the very trivial and the very serious. It was hard for staff to arrange detention for children because their own time, and that of the children, was almost fully occupied all day. It was difficult to take away a child's free time because

so many extra-curricular activities occurred in free time that the coincidence of free time for child and teacher was improbable. It was not school policy that punishments should take precedence over extra curricular activities.

### **Respect and Mental States**

Respect for an individual probably covers a range of various mental states, different in different holders of respect, which might be labelled as attitudes. These mental states may include feelings of affection, admiration, fear, trust, awe, awareness of, high regard for, fascination for, curiosity about, and possibly several others.

Combinations of these states can be regarded as forming attitudes towards particular individuals. As they are attitudes they are unlikely to be able to be changed voluntarily by the holder because they are systemic mental phenomena which are controlled by feedback which comes from both within the mind-but not from within the mind's awareness- and from without the mind. Suppositional states provide feed back from within the mind, but not from the mind's awareness. The individual's environment, which of course is affected by the individual's interaction with it, provides feed-back from outside the mind.

### **Attitudes and respect**

Attitudes and their formation are of fundamental importance not only to educating but to all human acting and interacting. However, the word attitude poses difficulties in its communication because it is an abstract noun which is used to stand for a range of apparent mental states which can never be directly known, and which therefore have considerable potential for

misrepresentation and misinterpretation. Attitudes are, I suggest, complex mental states with complex support mechanisms, which are labelled with a fairly simple word: attitude, which can lead to a supposition that they can be treated in a simple way.

Consideration of attitudes and respect is important for our teachers because several of them—not just the inexperienced—behave as though these phenomena were much more simple than I suggest they are. I say this because I have heard well qualified and experienced teachers say to children things like "why do you not show me any respect?" and "you must change your attitude."

### **Conflict**

There is potential for conflict in all human interacting, but in teaching, it is particularly significant because in many cases a teacher has to try to bring about children's doing something which they would really rather not do. The teacher also has to interpret what is going on from signals, verbal and non-verbal, and so some misinterpretation – which can lead to further conflict – is almost inevitable.

### **Communication of Attitudes**

Attitudes may be communicated by children to teachers by the way the children co-operate with the teachers and how polite or rude, verbally or non-verbally as the case may be, they seem to be to the teachers.

### **Non-verbal Communication, and Context Markers**

Non-verbal signals have particular potential for misinterpretation. For example a smirk or a giggle can

be interpreted as being disrespectful when in fact it may be a manifestation of a feeling of embarrassment, and, or, an inability to cope with the situation. Because respect is a prime concern to teachers, and because the children are aware of this, the concept of respect is an almost permanent context marker in many interactions-though there are of course exceptions-between teachers and children. Hence, conflict between children and teachers can easily be shifted to include not only the original issue at one level, but also the issue of respect at another level. In other words the notion of respect is a fairly constant context marker.

#### **Lack of co-operation as Lack of Respect**

To a teacher a clear indicator of lack of respect from children is lack of co-operation, or, more directly, disobedience and rudeness.

The co-operation of children can probably be regarded as being governed by their level of informal respect, formal respect and fear of punishment. Informal respect arises spontaneously and to a great extent cannot be controlled, but its development can probably be enhanced by manipulating the environment suitably. The establishment of formal respect, I suggest, is a useful step towards informal respect.

I still consider that discussion amongst staff about topics such as respect and attitudes could be helpful, particularly to the younger members who are probably less set in their ways and more concerned to improve, and, apparently, in many cases, more concerned with respect. My 1981 concern for analysis of concepts was perhaps more effective in dealing with the words and concepts involved - such as discipline and respect - rather than what was actually happening in the functioning.

I believe my own practice has improved considerably as a result of my awareness's being increased through my research. I feel more comfortable and think I function more effectively, though this may just be owing to my being older and having more practical experience. I do not pretend that I do not make mistakes - I make several, but I feel I have recently been much more aware when I have made them. I have felt I have had more understanding of what has been happening to me, and so I have felt better able to be critical of, and hence to control, my own practice.

### To Return To My Paper of 1981

What my paper did not do was to indicate how any permanent change might be made in the functioning of the relevant system which consisted of headmasters, staff and children thinking and acting in relation to matters of discipline. Subsequently, as the result of my research, I have formed the view that to achieve lasting change in a human system, changes have to be made within that system which impose forces which hold individuals in behaviour modes different from those which it was sought to change. What I did in my paper was to indicate what might have been desirable, together with some justification for it. What I did not indicate was a method by which changes could be imposed and maintained. I think I was aware of these deficiencies but felt there was not much more that I, in a fairly junior position, could do about it. What was required in the system was an individual who was capable of, and motivated towards, setting up new forces or tensions within the system. But, the headmaster and his assistant were not inclined this way, partly, I think, because they did not perceive the problem as being as serious as some staff did, and also because they had a fairly laissez-faire attitude towards the divergences in staff practices. Also, they

had previously rejected the idea of having someone else in charge of discipline, and so there did not seem much hope of any real change. Consequently, things stayed much the same; this to me, illustrates a limitation of analytical thinking without systemic thinking and systemic action in attempts to effect change in the functioning of an organisation.

### Dissatisfaction continued

Dissatisfaction with the children's discipline continued as before the extraordinary meeting of September 1981. The headmaster retired at the end of the summer term of 1983, and was succeeded by a man who, it was rumoured, had a reputation for firm discipline in his previous school. However, his previous school had been much smaller, only half the size of his new one, much simpler, with boys only, most of whom were day pupils.

### **New Headmaster Overwhelmed**

Problems soon arose and it became apparent that the new headmaster was overwhelmed by the greater complexity and lack of conventionality of the system. The discipline problem was one among many. His responses seemed to lack understanding and to suggest panic at times. This was not improved for him by the pressure exerted on him by several powerful personalities on the staff, many of whom were antagonistic towards him, almost from the time he started. Hence his position, which was initially weak, partly through lack of experience of such an environment and partly through a lack of great strength of personality, became weaker still in the face of mounting pressure, first indirectly from the children's behaviour, and, secondly, directly from many of the staff. He was not helped in this matter by the assistant headmaster who, while he

was academically gifted and clerically efficient, seemed to avoid interaction and, particularly, any sort of conflict with others, be they staff or children, when he could. This was perhaps largely because he lacked the personality necessary to be able to dominate in interactions concerning important issues.

### Extraordinary Staff Meeting, Summer 1985

At the end of the summer term of 1985 there was another extraordinary staff meeting in which discipline was again discussed. I do not claim to be a naturally good disciplinarian myself, but I feel I have learnt some simple techniques which help me function better, and so I suggested that during the next term the staff might meet specifically to discuss disciplinary techniques. It seemed that some of the problems existed because several staff, including both headmasters, were unaware of the advantages of some very basic techniques in the control of children.

#### **Classic example**

The assistant headmaster was a classic example of someone who had little hope of being listened to when he addressed the whole school, simply because he would begin by saying "Quiet please," and then continue talking without waiting for the children to stop talking, with the result that few did. (What he should have done, in my opinion, was to have said: "Stop talking and stand still please" and then waited until the children did so- "quiet" to children just means "less noise".)

However, he was not alone in increasing the weakness of his own practice in this way. There were others who seemed to think that if they acknowledged that they had to ask the children to be quiet more than

once, this was a greater implicit admission of weakness than continuing to speak to the children while they were still talking. This is related to another basic error made by several staff which was their not allowing themselves enough time to get the children settled before an activity. These staff were not helped by the extent and pace of the daily timetable, which incidentally have increased even further. (Once a visiting headmaster wrote, in a letter of thanks for being shown the school, that he had been glad to see how the school ran, and that he meant 'ran' literally.)

### **The daily schedule**

The daily schedule has always been long and tight and this has put pressure on some staff, making them rush. This pressure requires strength of will to resist it in order to begin any activity with the children settled and controlled so they have the opportunity to concentrate on the information which it is intended they should receive. The inability of some staff to resist this pressure led to their having greater difficulty in controlling the children, and hence their achievements with the children were less than they might have been. During 1985, in a generally very favourable report, an inspector commented that it was important that the attention of all the children should be obtained in silence before instructions are given. Some of the staff who had these difficulties complained about them openly at staff meetings; others were more guarded. As these deficiencies existed and because there were a few staff with particular competence in discipline and also the will to discuss techniques, I suggested that we arranged meetings to try to share some of this skill. The idea was accepted but nothing came of it the following term. That was term the autumn term which tends to be the least problematic as regards discipline, perhaps because it

is a time when the children have just moved in to new year groups and so devote more of their attention to the new demands upon them and the exploration of their new contexts. I did not pursue the matter that term because there seemed no urgent need to do so, but I made the following notes to record my thoughts at the time and as a basis for a paper which in the end I never wrote.

Discipline: Some Thoughts

September 1985.

A. General comments for members of staff and head-masters.

1. There will always be idiosyncrasies and divergences of standards amongst staff. But, we must aim at a degree of commonality of standard and expectation. We must try to help each other more, and back up each other.
2. There must be regular reminders of basic principles.
3. We must discuss practice more. What about a regular seminar - fortnightly or monthly - to discuss practice?
4. We must try to discuss problems more openly and try to help those who have them.
5. We must try to identify those areas where help is needed.
6. If we are critical of one another we must try to remain sympathetic and constructive.
7. We must aim to make one another comfortable but

not complacent.

B. Differences between us.

With reference to important differences of opinion amongst staff, and likes and dislikes of one another, we must try to accept the world as we find it, but be aware that we can tailor it to a degree.

C. Control

We must consider control. Is being in control the putting right of more than is going wrong? Or is it being in a position to put right more than is going wrong? What sort of control must a child have of her or his space. To have control she or he must know as clearly as is possible what is expected, and be able to carry out what is required. What sort of control must we have of our spaces? We must have information and capability as do the children.

Are there times when we are apparently not in control but we are in a position to assume or take control at any given time - i.e. we are letting the situation run? I believe we are all able to be in control all the time, if we adhere to appropriate strategies, but we do not all take control all the time. If we do not take control appropriately in situations with groups of children, the children will do so in many cases.

I believe that to a large extent it is the organisation and appearance of our disciplinary action which requires more care.

Discipline problems have existed here during the last 18 years in which I have known the

school, though all the children and all the staff, save for two, have changed.

D. Are children generally becoming more difficult to control?

Do we have to accept an apparent increase in naughtiness, disobedience, rudeness, carelessness and vandalism, because all these are manifestations of a general trend? Is this the world as it is? Are the children developing in spaces which are now less accessible to us than they were?

Are our expectations of hypothetical teacher/pupil relationships enlarging the problem for us?

E. Reassurance

As long as we ensure we have: overall control, with perhaps an overall directive from the headmaster (including continuous insistence on standards to children and staff); an outline of a common standard and practice; better back up from each other; and we help those members of staff who need it, then we should be all right. Basically all that is needed is for everyone to make more effort in a number of different ways in order to attend to the complexity of the problem. We have to create the appearance of more general and corporate disapproval of indiscipline.

## **Discipline-some suggestions for practice**

### Techniques in controlling and addressing groups of children

1. Do not "chance your arm" by requesting silence and attention when it is practically very difficult or impossible to achieve (e.g. when senior children are legitimately checking-up to see who is missing at the beginning of assembly)
2. Use "Stop talking (please)" and "Stand/sit still (please)" instead of "Be quiet", "Silence", "Listen", "Quiet please" etc.  
Repeat if necessary. Demonstrate dissatisfaction on third repetition)

If poor response to 2, pick on a suitable individual who is, if possible:-

not very sensitive,  
not a very rare offender,  
not a recognised very regular offender,  
not regularly picked on (as far as you know),  
not a personal bête noire (which you will think you should not have, but which you will have).

3. "Listen carefully (please)"  
"Pay attention please"

Insist that the children remain silent and look at you and at least give the impression of listening. If there is talking or lack of attention etc. insist on required response before going on with announcement or whatever.

4. Initially when addressing children we must try not to speak with language and tone which imply expectations of misbehaviour, inattention, disrespect, carelessness. If they sense it is expected they often will oblige. Also, we should avoid utterances implying our own low regard for general school discipline and/or inadequacy of colleagues.

## Comments of 1991 On My Notes of 1985

I still believe in the principles I tried to get across in the notes above. However I now do not believe that the writing of papers for headmasters and staff is an efficient way of getting them to change their general behaviour significantly.

Consequently, in my 1991 initiative on discipline, to which I refer at the end of this section, I have tried to think of ways of instituting in the organisation routines which help to keep principles further to the front of people's minds.

Ultimately, however, the adherence to these routines is dependent upon individuals, headmasters and senior master in particular; how to institute controls which ensure people adhere to the required routines is a problem I have yet to resolve.

## Autumn Term 1985

### A new teacher

The autumn term saw the arrival of a new assistant master to teach a major subject at senior level. He had been previously employed in the headmaster's former school, and he let it be known that the headmaster had asked him to join our staff partly to try to improve the discipline. As he had come from the same, very different and much less complex school as the headmaster, it was perhaps not surprising that he also had difficulties with discipline when he arrived. He tried to solve them in a fairly heavy handed way, and this led to further difficulties. These developed more critically in his second term, when some other staff began to complain, again about the general attitude and behaviour of the children. The result was that another

extraordinary staff meeting was arranged to discuss discipline, at the end of that term.

**Thoughts before another extraordinary staff meeting on discipline**

Before this meeting I tried hard to think of some way of actually improving the situation which had become a long term concern. I had witnessed so much discussion of this subject, all of which took much the same course, under two headmasters over a period of at least six years, that I felt that the only way actually to achieve a desirable change would be by some completely new action.

**A Need for Someone New To Take On Responsibility for Discipline**

I considered the divergences of expectations amongst staff, and the lack of a comprehensive and co-ordinated disciplinary policy. Neither of the headmasters was likely to do anything effective about the problem. As I have mentioned, the assistant headmaster, though responsible for discipline, avoided doing any more than the minimum, and the headmaster either did not have time to give to the matter, or, what was more likely, had little idea what to do about it. It seemed we needed someone else to take responsibility for discipline: someone who was motivated and energetic enough to make their presence felt around the school, often if irregularly, and also to co-ordinate a more extensive disciplinary system which seemed to be needed by those staff who found difficulty in coping on their own.

## **System of Punishments**

There was a standardised system of punishment marks but it seemed to cater for only the trivial and the serious misdemeanour. There were late and noisy marks which, if accumulated to the extent of three or more in any one week, led to a period of five minutes detention per mark. For much more serious offences there were conduct marks which led to two hours detention. The lack of punishments between these extremes led many staff to impose their own. This required time they could ill afford to spare, and, for the weaker members of staff it sometimes compounded the difficulties.

## **Lack of Personal Qualities in Headmaster and Assistant Headmaster**

For some time I had thought that together the headmaster and assistant headmaster lacked the necessary qualities to cope with all the demands upon them. There appeared to be a case for their being joined by a third person to take on some of the tasks they left undone, and to assume some of the roles they left vacant. A significant factor was the lack of vigilance of the new headmaster.

There had been problems under the previous headmaster but he had made an effort to compensate for his natural inadequacies by making a point of being seen around the school, including the dormitories, much more frequently than his successor who seemed unwilling to spend the time. The previous headmaster was industrious and dedicated, but he also had lacked the personality to be a natural disciplinarian. In thinking over all this I had in mind the previous senior master and the man, whom I described in my section on the history, foundation and ethos of the school, who

had been senior master, and later headmaster of the school at which I had been a pupil. But these men were tall—which I think can be a help—exceptional personalities, talented in a variety of ways, and gifted teachers of French and Mathematics respectively. Nevertheless I felt we needed to try to complement our inadequate duo with some functioning similar to that of these two men.

### **Little Choice**

There was little choice. I had a feeling that the new heavy handed man might have been being groomed for the role of senior master, but I thought it important that this be prevented because he was certainly not ready to take it on.

I could think of only one member of staff who could be considered a suitable candidate.

In his favour he was intelligent, industrious, and an effective teacher, well motivated towards doing something about the discipline, and he had ideas about the revision of the penal system. He was a relatively effective disciplinarian, though he had to work quite hard to achieve this, and he lived on the premises, which meant he could patrol the school at any time. He was not already too heavily committed to take on the job, and, he was tall. He was also clearly ambitious, which I felt was an advantage, though I knew the evidence of this in his demeanour irritated some of his colleagues, perhaps not least because he was the youngest man on the staff at the time.

### **Other Teachers' Jealousy**

I considered the possible effects of other teachers' jealousy on the efficacy of the appointment

of my nominee, but I thought there were only two other staff members who really would have wanted the job.

One of these was the new "heavy handed" man who was still being "broken in"- not always so gently-by other senior staff, who, I thought were quite strong enough to keep him under control. The other was long established, but slightly isolated in relation to the staff in general, and was known for making a bit of a fool of himself at times, so I felt he would not cause much trouble.

It seemed there would inevitably be other instances of competitive and aggressive behaviour in relation to the appointment, but I thought that these might act usefully as a control factor on the power seeking behaviour of my nominee. I did not foresee the escalation of competitive behaviour to the point of its being significantly damaging. There seemed an adequate number of staff who, though they disapproved of some of my nominee's characteristics, would favour the appointment enough to help make it work.

#### **Against My Nominee**

Against my nominee it was fair to say that he was not an outstanding personality, and, though he tried to reason out the effects of some of the things he said to other members of staff in his attempts to effect change at meetings and in informal conversations, he lacked a certain amount of social sense about how to deal with adults. This applied also to his dealings with children, with whom his relationship appeared strained. His teaching success seemed largely based on his hard edged clarity, precise organisation of material and the children's fear of failing his tests. It was his ability with adults which concerned me most, but I thought he was sufficiently circumspect to be con-

trolled by his natural reticence, and also willing and able to learn. However though ambitious and quite pleased with himself, he was to some extent aware of his lack of social skill, and clearly found some of the other senior staff formidable. His hard edged thinking seemed to lead him to a belief that other staff could and should be as efficient as he, in his way, was; first, his overtly holding this view and, secondly, his rather blunt means of getting it across to others, were detrimental to his relations with many staff.

### **In spite of Reservations**

In spite of my reservations, I thought the idea was worth considering further. I was particularly concerned that, at the time, no one was showing a particularly active interest in the discipline of the school, and hence there was no one providing the necessary vigilance and tension required in order to keep the system functioning at a higher standard. I thought the appointment of my nominee would facilitate an improvement, but I was fairly tentative as I was aware that it was an important change for the school and the individual concerned, and that therefore further consultation with senior members of staff was necessary.

### **Decision to Suggest the Idea**

I decided to suggest the idea at the meeting the following day, without mentioning names but with a view to discussing the idea in more detail with the headmaster later, if it received general approval. In search of another opinion I telephoned the school secretary who had acute perception and sensitivity about people. She mentioned the objections some staff had to my nominee's and his wife's ambition and fairly clear desire for power, but she agreed we needed somebody to do the job and that there was really no one

else appropriate. I then telephoned my nominee to ask if he would be willing to do the job. He said he was flattered to think that I thought him suitable, that he would like to do the job, but, that it would need careful consideration and negotiation as regards what was actually entailed. I agreed, and he approved of the way I intended to initiate the action.

### At the Meeting

At the meeting the discussion took the usual inconsequential course; no suggestions for new action emerged. I let everyone I thought would speak do so, and then I made my suggestion, tactfully I think, pointing out that the two headmasters had more than enough to cope with as it was, without doing the work of the proposed senior master. The idea was well received, and the staff were in favour of the headmaster's and my conferring on the matter during the holidays. After the meeting the assistant headmaster came and thanked me for my suggestion, not, I think, without a hint of relief in his voice. When I met with the headmaster later in the holidays he was much in favour of the idea. I pointed out my reservations, and agreed to sound out more of the senior staff. This I did during the following term, and, as will I hope become clear from my notes of August 1986 and what follows, I had consulted enough staff who had definite reservations to make me have serious second thoughts: not about the need for someone to do the job, but about my nominee.

In August 1986 I wrote the following notes for myself about the discipline and senior master issue. Also included here are some later comments and then some suggestions regarding some of the metaphysics involved.

The story about the appointment of a senior master is resumed on page 423.

### Behaviour and Discipline

August 1986

#### **Various Concerns**

There have been various unsatisfactory occurrences at local levels involving at least three members of staff, and there has been one chronic case of difficulty with discipline involving one unfortunate member of staff.

Some members of staff have reported experiences from a position of apparent ascendancy, blaming "the system". Others have recounted with more humility.

#### An impression of a serious problem

An impression of a serious general problem has been created. My view is that the level of control could and should be better. Some members of staff who do not admit to a problem at their local level, still maintain that there is a general problem. Many of these staff blame the inconsistency and poor standards of others: the headmaster and assistant headmaster particularly.

There are actual problems which, combined, give rise to the perception, for some, of a general problem. This general problem has arisen from the exchanges of various perceptions of what is actual, what is possible, and what is desirable.

There is much concern about attitudes. One of my senior colleagues said at the end of last term, Spring term 1986, that we need either love, fear or respect from the children, but we have none of these at the moment. This may be a complaint about the relatively inaccessible and untreatable "why" of the problem, i.e.

an attempt at an explanation in cause and effect thinking which may be inappropriate as regards practical effect. Perhaps we should be concerned more with the "what" and allow the "why" to take care of itself. In other words perhaps we should focus on behaviour, i.e. the "what", and not attitudes i.e. the "why", though both require some hard thinking.

### **Variety of Expectations**

Some staff have created extra tension by emphasising an idea that their expectations are higher than those of the headmaster and his assistant. The intention behind this emphasis seems to be to imply that the holding of such elevated expectation connotes a high degree of professionalism and efficiency in the holder.

### **Expectations of the Headmaster Are Not High Enough**

Nevertheless, it is true, in my view, that the expectations of the headmaster and his assistant are not what they should be. I say more about this in relation to the metaphysics in the issue.

## Headmasters' suppositional states in conflict

with those of some staff

August 1986

During the staff meeting at the end of the term before last, Spring 1986, both the headmasters seemed to reveal their suppositional states as regards ceilings of capability of children in relation to behaviour. Their views appeared to be based on absolutes for what children ought and ought not to be expected to do. These views are in conflict with those of many of the staff.

### **An Example of a Limiting Suppositional State**

The assumption or suppositional state that children have natural, entirely predetermined behaviour capability ceilings as opposed to regarding their behaviour as being part of an interacting, which can be modified by adjusting tensions in their context, seems limiting and restricting.

### **More good than bad in our system, but there are concerns**

There is an immense amount of good in our system, and the defects are small in proportion, in my view.

Generally our children are well motivated, lively and spontaneous; but clearly they are more than a bit much for some of our staff, some of the time, so I would not discount the existence of problems.

### **Nastiness**

There seems to be more sheer nastiness creeping in to our children's behaviour.

July 1990 Comment on remark on nastiness of August 1986

Looking back it now seems that this remark about "nastiness" specifically, of 1986, was influenced by a particularly bad year as far as the senior children were concerned. 1987 was better but not good. 1988 was an excellent year and 1989 was good. 1990 brought slightly different concerns to which I will refer later.

Difficulties arising from apparent divergences  
in awareness

August 1986

Some staff, including the headmasters, have the facility to "turn a blind eye" when control becomes difficult in some cases. If they can live with this then so be it, but they should not ignore or dismiss the problems others have when they can not accept their own difficulties. Of course this latter line can be taken to an extreme at which it can create more problems than it solves.

Deficiencies in individuals' practices

If I am asked, as I have been by a member of staff who has been adversely affected in her particular area of responsibility, not to put two particular members of staff on duty together because recently it resulted in near chaos - in fact the combination occurred as a result of swapping out of my control-it strikes me that there could be improvements in technique which these two might be helped to make. There are strong social forces which prevent our interfering with one another's practice, but the major difficulty seems to be the finding of a subtle means of gaining access initially.

## Difficulties in helping individual staff

### **"Intrametasyntemic" Change**

It seems easy to make the problem seem infinitely complex-which it is almost-and hence unmanageable, and to consider second order action impossible. However, perhaps a technique would be to consider the system as a system of systems and hence develop metasyntemic change within the overall system, i.e. "intrametasyntemic" change.

### **Help for Particular Individuals**

Here I am suggesting we consider individual members of staff and try to help them individually. I suggest this because I think I can see how some members of staff get themselves in to difficulties as the result of mistakes made through a lack of awareness of some basic principles in dealing with children.

### **Difficulty of Gaining Access**

A great difficulty here is gaining access to the problem area. A major caveat is that of being aware of dangers associated with an adviser advising someone on how to manage their individual context when the adviser has necessarily only limited knowledge of that context, and, further, if he enters it he changes it.

### **Do the Weaker Staff Make It More Difficult For All Staff**

Some of the staff who have less trouble with discipline think that those staff who are weaker as regards discipline make things more difficult for all the staff. I am not sure how much this is the case but this is another reason for my trying to think of ways

in which individual teachers could be helped.

### **A Few Teachers Have Considerable Difficulty**

A few of our teachers have considerable difficulty controlling the children. Fortunately each one of these complains about the problem. Unfortunately none of these teachers displays recognition that the problems may arise from something that he or she is doing wrong.

### **Treating Contexts Individually**

If one were to treat each of these teaching contexts individually, one might be able to make some useful suggestions as regards practice, given the opportunity to do some observation.

Some of us staff are in a position to advise constructively. Gaining access to the context however would be difficult. If we visited only the classes of those with trouble, the children would soon realise what was happening.

There would be a question of balancing the tension on, and embarrassment of, the particular teachers against the overall benefit to the school.

### **Delicate Issue, Comments of July 1990**

Because I thought this a delicate issue I never pursued this idea of trying to provide help for those teachers with difficulties. Almost every teacher has difficulty when he or she arrives. Most adapt fairly quickly and then function reasonably well. An appreciable few however, never seem to get a grip. If I were headmaster I would not be satisfied with this state of affairs.

### **My View Now, July 1990**

My view now is that we should provide each new teacher with a senior member of staff to guide him or her in the first year at least. If this were a matter of course, some of the difficulties of access and embarrassment might be overcome. I would also like there to be occasional staff meetings at which staff were encouraged to talk about disciplinary techniques, because I think we could all benefit from a sharing of ideas. The headmaster himself might acquire some more ideas and hence become a better adviser/counsellor. I suggest that some practical points-I tried to list some of those that occurred to me in my 1985 paper-are transferable, while others are not, because they are dependent on characteristics of individuals.

### **The Eventual Introduction of the Senior Master, Comment of July 1990**

The eventual introduction of the senior master seems to have helped the weaker staff to some extent because he has instituted a system of punishments between the trivial and the very serious. These they can use without giving themselves extra work. However, the functioning of the weaker staff is not as good as I would like.

### **Supervision of All New Staff, Comment Of July 1990**

I would like to see the institution of a system of supervision of, and help for, all new staff in an attempt to enhance their skill and provide them with contextual support. I have discussed this with the senior master who agrees with me in principle. An obstacle is the difficulty of convincing the headmaster that it would be a good idea. He seems to take the view that some staff will always be better than the others, in

different ways, and that there is not much that can be done about it. He takes a similar view with the children. This is another difficulty arising out of divergences of suppositional states.

### Effects of the Introduction of the Senior Master

I say more about the effects of the introduction of a senior master, the actual development of disciplinary control, as well as how I think it ought to be, towards the end of this chapter on discipline, starting on page 405.

### Some of the Metaphysics Behind Our Discussions of Discipline

Discussion of the issue of discipline has occurred regularly at meetings. Bearing in mind an idea, which I have come across in systems theory, that a system must have somewhere to move towards-a state within its reach apparently, but sufficiently difficult to attain to make it a goal to be striven for-I think this sort of discourse amongst staff is beneficial because staff are able to air their views about how to improve things; but, I have to concede that it seems it is often of little consequence practically. This is because the discussions easily become trapped in the sort of metaphysical circles I tried to indicate in the following passage from my chapter on metaphysics.

### An extract from my chapter on metaphysics

#### Conflict about discipline

As an example of conflict of different metaphysical systems within a system of knowing which has no formally organised conventions in the sense that my

arithmetical example p.91. has them, I offer my perceptions of some of the arguments put forward about the origins of, and potential remedies for, some of the discipline problems in the school. I indicate only some of what I see as the relevant levels.

### **Complex Mixture of Views**

Because this is about a complex mixture of views about a concern arising from a complex of components, there could of course be different lists of levels of suppositions, depending upon whose view was examined. However, there are certain suppositions which can be assumed to have existed on the basis of what people have said in meetings.

### **Table**

In the table below the lists of suppositions relate to three separate lines of thinking which I felt I could identify.

One of these was that of a group of staff who felt that there were significant deficiencies in the functioning of several other staff and the headmaster. Column A relates to this group.

An other was a line of thought of a group of staff who felt that the concerns arose as a result of deficiencies in the headmaster; Column B relates to this group.

The other was the line of thought of the headmaster. Column B can relate to this group if "some staff" is substituted for "headmaster."

The initial suppositions: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, seemed to me to be unanimously held in these discussions.

In Column A there seems a degree of circularity through (i) (b) and (i) (c); all these have been labelled (i) as they seem to occupy the same level.

Table of suppositions of three lines of thought about discipline

**Initial suppositions which seemed unanimously held**

1. Opinions of an individual are likely to change as a result of that individual's participation in discussion.
2. Attitudes of individuals are likely to change as a result of changes in their opinions.
3. Generalised behaviour of individuals can change as a result of changes in attitudes.
4. Functioning of individuals changes as a result of changes in generalised behaviour.  
Functioning of school changes as a result of changes in generalised behaviour of individual staff.

**Column A**

- Ai)a)  
Deficiencies exist in functioning of some staff and that of headmaster.
- Ai)b)  
Deficiencies exist in the school's functioning as a system.
- Aii)  
Functioning of the system can be changed by asking individuals to change, without imposing permanent tensions within the system.
- Aiii)  
Something could be done to improve the functioning of the system.
- Aiv)  
Something should be done to improve the functioning of the system.
- Av)  
If we think more clearly about how individuals ought to function, describe this to them and ask them to adopt it, then they will improve and our organisation will function better.

**Column B**

- Bi)a) Headmasters functioning can be changed.
- Bi)b) Deficiencies exist in the functioning of the headmaster.
- Bi)c) Deficiencies exist in the functioning of the school as a system.
- Bii)  
Functioning of the system can be changed by asking the headmaster to change.
- Biii)  
Something could be done to improve the functioning of the system.
- Biv)  
Something should be done to improve the functioning of the system.
- Bv)  
If we think more clearly about how

the headmaster should function, describe this more desirable functioning to him, and ask that he adopt it, then he will come to function in a more desirable way, and the school will function better.

The table above is an attempt to set out some of the suppositions which seemed to underpin three significant positions taken up in many of the meetings we used to have about discipline.

### **No Decisions**

No decisions to take action were made. This, perhaps, was not surprising given the suppositions. However, there was much discussion which included criticism of individuals' practices, and, as I describe in a later section devoted to this subject, the arguments became quite acrimonious at times. Outcomes of the meetings consisted of appeals from various quarters, including the headmaster, for more consistency and firmness and, from some staff, appeals for fear inspiring behaviour from the headmaster in particular.

### **Content Level and Context Level**

There is an important point, which is related to the theory of logical types and the notion of levels of discourse, to add here. It is as follows. The fact that the arguments became acrimonious indicates strongly that much of the argument resulted partly from conflict between the personalities involved at a personal level, as opposed to merely conflict between their views. The argument was therefore not only at a content level but also at a context level. Perhaps any

argument has the potential thus to acquire new levels as a result of the suppositions which arise in one participant about other parties to the conflict, when he or she is contradicted.

### **Schism**

Argument has the potential to become a self escalating schism, what Watzlawcik called a symmetrical schism, because of the inherent potential for competition to be perceived by the participants.

### **Meetings Over Seven Years**

Discussions with bases similar to those outlined above took place at several meetings over a period of at least seven years, during which there were a few staff changes, and in the middle of which there was a change of headmaster. The fact that very little, if any, effective change in functioning was made, suggests that the suppositions of all the parties described lacked potential for practical efficacy.

### **Another Set of Suppositions**

Another set of suppositions, on which more recent action was based, seemed to result in more profit. The bases of the position may be outlined as follows.

A system's functioning can be changed permanently by altering or introducing permanent components within the system.

Part of the difficulty of changing the functioning of a mind is that it is impossible to get inside a mind to change permanent components. These components must be identified as imposing tensions on, and therefore being external to, subsystems within the bigger system

which is the mind. Permanent control tensions are much more easily put in place outside a mind than inside a mind. Examples of these tensions are rules, laws, official systems of punishment and reward. Hence suppositions with more potential pay off could be as follows.

Table of suppositions, with more potential "pay off"

1. Deficiencies exist in the organisation of the school (as a system).  
There is circularity, i.e. self control of the system through feedback, here in 1. and 2. but to attend to the deficiencies we have to "get outside" the system conceptually.
2. Deficiencies exist in the functioning of the school (as a system).
3. Deficiencies exist in the functioning of individual staff in the school.
4. Functioning of individual staff can be changed by imposing permanent tensions external to them within the system.
5. Something could be done to improve the organisation and hence the functioning of the system.
6. Something should be done to improve the organisation and hence the functioning of the system.
7. If we think more clearly about how systems of individuals (who are themselves systems) work and can be changed, then we can make more effective changes and our organisation can function better as a result. (i.e. we have to bear in mind the idea of systems control and hence feedback).

### Too much talk and no action

Because these metaphysical circles have underpinned much of the discussion of this issue in many meetings, a resentment of this discussion has arisen based on a feeling of there being too much talk and no action.

### Getting outside the metaphysical circle:

#### the idea of a senior master

August 1986

When this subject was discussed at the end of last term (Spring 1986) I suggested the creation of a post of responsibility for discipline. This was an attempt to get outside what I perceived as an interacting of inappropriate metaphysical systems which was resulting in deadlock and the production of effete solutions.

#### A new dynamic

My suggestion we should have a senior master was made on the basis of Stafford Beer's point in Platform for Change that to effect lasting change in a system a new dynamic has to be created. By dynamic I understand a control factor which is a force keeping the system in the state in which it is. Control factors are what S. Beer would refer to as governors in the sense that some engines have governors to stop the engine running too fast. These governors impose control to maintain the status quo by means of negative feedback.

#### A Govenor on a Diesel Engine

A diesel engine has to have a governor because it pumps its own fuel into itself. If the engine runs faster, the pump runs faster pumping in more fuel per

unit time making the engine run faster still. If it were not governed by means of a device which slows it at a certain speed, the engine would eventually blow up.

#### A senior master

Although I had some one suitable-so I thought at the time - in mind, my perception of the need, and the way it might be attended to, led me to the belief that I might do the job myself. Whoever was to do it, I regarded the change as one to be made only with a great deal of care. So, when consulted later by the head-master - just before a governors' meeting at which he wanted to discuss the idea -, partly because of some recent unforeseen objections to my nominee, I decided to play safe, and so suggested we waited.

Comment of July 1990

**Over Cautious**

In retrospect it seems I was over cautious about this appointment. It was the first major change I had suggested, and I lacked confidence partly because I had no experience of instigating such change. I felt sensitive to the fact that the change would be irreversible and once made, its effects could be long lasting and control over them limited.

Now, I would feel more confident about instigating such a change, having had this previous experience.

At the time I thought the idea was useful in principle and worth preserving, and so I listed some of the functions I thought the senior master should try to fulfil. I also thought my nominee should be reconsidered, and so I recorded my thoughts about him.

Thoughts About the Prospect of Appointing a Senior Master in Order to Improve Children's Behaviour and Hence the Functioning of the School as a System, August 1986

Reasons (which suggest sub-goals): the two headmasters lack the following in sufficient measure.

1. The conscientiousness to insist on standards (they are prepared to "let things go" too much).
2. The will to confront (staff and children).
3. The will to be prepared to do things which might be unpopular with the children.
4. The awareness of what is going on.
5. The will and energy to be vigilant.
6. Natural concern and hence motivation.
7. Natural authority (influence?).
8. Acquired influence through contrived practice.
9. The regard from children.
11. Manner with the children.
12. Manner with the staff.
13. The ability to control children.
14. The confidence of the staff in their judgement as regards discipline.

**Need for Reflection**

I have to reflect on this matter because I will probably be asked to discuss it with the headmaster again. It is an irreversible change which has a multitude of potential ramifications, and hence it needs a lot of thought.

I think my colleague whom I proposed (in private with the headmaster but with the colleague's knowledge) has all the required characteristics stated in my list in excess of the headmasters though I am not too happy about 11. and 12. as far as he is concerned. I suspect

he could cause trouble amongst the staff by being too dogmatic, hard edged and dictatorial, partly as the result of the strong influence on him of what he thinks an ideal teacher is like. He is obviously ambitious and wants more power than, I suspect, the headmasters are prepared to cede. This may mean that, if he were to negotiate his appointment, he would either turn it down or accept with the intention of increasing his powers by degrees: this could be dangerous. I would resent it immensely.

### **His Wife**

His wife, also on the staff, is probably more ambitious than him; she indulges in similarly self righteous discourse which suggests an intention to imply good "professional" teacher status.

### **Extraordinary disciplinary disturbances**

I originally suggested this appointment at an extraordinary staff meeting to discuss discipline at the end of the Spring term, 1986. There had been some extraordinary disciplinary disturbances and some cases of over reaction from headmaster and staff. This was in many cases the result of escalating competitive interaction between the headmaster and staff at the daily morning staff briefing meetings particularly.

### **For Example (Anecdotal Digression)**

For example, on one occasion some children disclosed that one of the twenty-year-old assistant cooks, who in her spare time helped the children look after their pet rabbits and hamsters, had allowed some of the children a few puffs on a cigarette. This resulted in outcry from some staff who, overlooking the fact that the young cook probably should never have been left

alone with the children, demanded her instant dismissal.

The bursar involved himself by holding a sort of mock trial which resulted in the young cook racing off away from the school on foot, causing such concern that the police were called to find her. The arrival of the police at the school, just when the day children were being collected, did little to abate the current rumours.

All this provided ample scope for the more vociferous staff at the daily briefing session the next morning. Some thought the cook should be dismissed, some blamed the children; others said the appearance of the police had led to rumours, and yet others said the whole issue had been very badly handled. The headmasters failed to inspire confidence by giving a clear and firm lead. They were under much pressure, not least from my nominee who, I thought, was misguided in his victimisation of the young cook. (In my view she should never have been put in a position in which she was left alone to supervise children in a remote building.) It seemed at one point that the pressure from my nominee and the bursar on the headmaster was such that the cook would be asked to leave. [Fortunately I was able to convey my view to the bursar behind the scenes, that this would be an unwise move - not least because there were no legal grounds for her dismissal- and the result was that she stayed.]

### **Regular Pressure**

My nominee regularly pressurises the headmasters at morning briefings, often with some justification, but mainly, I think, because he is ambitious. His ambition is another factor in my considering him for the role of senior master; I think he might be more produc-

tive if some of the context markers of competition were removed from the context which contains him and the headmasters.

### **Headmaster Often Out of Touch**

It strikes me that often the headmaster is out of touch with what is going on. He also tends to get pushed in to ill-considered and inappropriate action as a result of attempting to make decisions in "public", inviting on himself a competitive haranguing from attention seeking, image cutting staff. Also it seems fairly clear that there is little confidence in his and his assistants judgement. This lack of confidence is implicitly voiced as much by my nominee as by anyone else. Hence, in favour of the appointment, it seems that the headmaster might acquire much needed confidence if he had the counsel of, and more public support from, my nominee.

My nominee disagrees openly with the headmaster considerably, but I feel he would, given more status and the opportunity to advise, give more support to the headmaster publicly.

### **Expressions of reservation**

However, a term has passed since I suggested the idea of my nominee becoming senior master, and since then I have received four separate expressions of reservation from members of staff, and four unsolicited suggestions that I should do the job myself. In some ways I should like to do it, but I have too much to do as it is. My nominee, I know, is very keen to be appointed, but I also know he is aware that it will be difficult for him to obtain the terms he wants from the headmasters. He is now probably curious and apprehensive and would like to know the outcome, one way or

other.

### **Always Doubts**

Always, there are likely to be doubts about proposed change, because the level of subsequent control can be difficult to predict.

I am glad that, through dilatoriness partly, this proposal is still under discussion because my perceptions of my nominee have changed considerably since March. I now sense that he (and his wife), partly through their ambition, have become much more prone to taking an autocratic stance on issues, whereas when they had less power when they were junior they were vociferous advocates of more openness and democracy in our system. Hence there would be the possibility, if he were appointed, of a reduction in the degree of interaction between staff and decision makers: as there is freedom of, and fairly good, interaction across, the staff level, this might reduce the chances of the most appropriate decisions emerging; this assumes that, if appointed, he were successful in obtaining most of the power he wants.

### **My Nominee Appointed, September 1986**

The next time I heard of the matter was at the end of the summer holidays, on September 12th, when my nominee telephoned me to say that the headmaster had asked him to become senior master as from the beginning of the term which would begin four days later. He wanted my advice as to what to do. He obviously wanted the job but was unsure how to negotiate for what he wanted to get out of it, with so little time available. As I still had reservations about him, I advised him to stall for more time to consider the matter, particularly as this was the first time the headmaster had

mentioned it to him. However, both he and the headmaster were clearly keen to settle the appointment, so I lent him my paper on discipline 1981, my notes on discipline and practice (1985), and a copy of the notes I had recently made on the idea of a senior master (1986) as a possible base for his discussion with the headmasters

### Priorities

My nominee had listed the priorities he wished to establish with the headmaster. These were, in his words, the following.

September 1986

1. Powers - smacking the children?
2. Involvement with the patrol leaders' meetings.
3. On a par with the assistant headmaster.
4. Organisation of staff duties.
5. Consulted on decisions involving staff duties.

My comments, August 1990, with reference to the list above:

1. This was not granted. At the time corporal punishment was used sparingly in the boys' boarding accommodation. The assistant headmaster was in charge of the junior boys boarding. He used the punishment in this context but not as master in charge of the discipline of the whole school. The school's intention then was that corporal punishment should eventually cease altogether; it now has.
2. This concerned being involved with the patrol leaders who were the sixteen equivalents of prefects. They were given minor supervisory roles such as being in charge of dormitories and tables at meals when the staff did not attend, and they were assigned duties

such as locking up the school at night and sorting the mail in the mornings. They were generally responsible for maintaining order in the absence of staff. They met with the headmaster and assistant headmaster once a week when they were given guidance on leadership and had the opportunity to air their concerns about children and the running of the school in general.

It seemed to my nominee and to me that this was a meeting to which it was important for him to gain access because it was a weekly formal opportunity for the patrol leaders to be instructed; it seemed that the tone of the school could be influenced considerably by what occurred at these meetings. Our view was that the headmasters did not have high enough expectations of the patrol leaders, did not demand high enough standards of them, and were generally too easy going with them, even currying favour with them at times. We also understood that the patrol leaders were covertly encouraged to comment on members of staff. Neither of us had ever attended one of these meetings, so all this was deduced from what the headmasters and children said about them; but we disapproved of what we thought took place.

My nominee agreed with me that it was desirable for him to try to attend these meetings, but he has never done so because they take place on his evening off. I have encouraged him to try to attend some of the meetings but his wife is, quite understandably, very protective about their time off. He also tells me he has not felt encouraged to attend by the headmaster and assistant headmaster. It may be that the headmasters continue to hold these meetings on his evening off simply to make it more difficult for him to attend.

3. This to my nominee meant his being regarded by staff and children as equal with the assistant head-

master. He felt, particularly, that he, like the assistant headmaster, should not have to do weekly and week-end duties, as this would set him aside from the rest of the staff. I advised him to do as many duties as any other member of staff, not only in order to avoid the sort of contempt the staff had for the assistant headmaster for his not doing duties, but also in order to keep firmly in touch with what was going on and the sort of problems the staff were facing. This he agreed to do.

4. This he took over from me. I had done the job since the assistant headmaster had asked me to take it on from him because, I suspected, he found it difficult to deal with staff complaints about their duty commitments. While organising it I had always done a little more duty than anyone else and I had had no difficulties with complaints. Since I gladly handed this task over to the senior master he has adopted my policy and he has not complained of any difficulty.

5. This involved collaborating with the headmaster in deciding, who should do what in the way of duties. There were some staff who did not do duties because they had never been asked to do them. This was a relic of a time when women teachers had not done duties. When my nominee's wife arrived at the school she argued in favour of the women doing duties to gain more equivalence with the men. The younger women teachers were gradually co-opted, as they arrived, but there were still some older women who did no duties; they seemed to be part-time, but in fact were not. These people my nominee incorporated, quite justifiably to my mind, within the duty system, with the consent of the headmaster.

My notes on some of the desired functioning  
of a senior master

**Some undisciplined thoughts on the idea of a senior master, 5th May 1986**

I proposed this idea on the basis of a theory that to effect significant change in a system a change in control factors is required.

Perhaps a senior master ought to do the following.

1. To be the penultimate stage, as regards discipline, before the assistant headmaster and headmaster.
2. To aim to provide a measure of consistency and commonality of staff disciplinary practice, and sharpen the awareness of the children.
3. To keep watch on the level of behaviour generally, particularly at times when the children are free.
4. To be supportive to the duty master.
5. To help the headmasters devise and revise the disciplinary system.
6. To liaise with the headmasters and tutors- but to remain himself a tutor- particularly over behavioural concerns.
7. To provide practical guidance to staff and senior children.
8. To provide opportunities for improving practice. For example: perhaps to lead enquiry in to practice through occasional discussion groups. It seems discuss-

sion of practice could be important because we are all learners as well as teachers, and shared practical hints can be beneficial. We have a range of experience and expertise, amongst the members of staff, some of which I suggest could be transferred to good effect.

9. To set general standards, with the backing of the headmasters and staff, and to try to maintain them through energetic vigilance, particularly at significant times such as before and after breakfast, lunch time, before assemblies, and at gatherings such as films and lectures. Obviously this would not be carried out by means of a non-stop twenty four hour roving technique, but by fairly frequent but irregular patrolling.

10. To be available daily to have children sent to him, if they have been naughty enough- classroom misdemeanours included; but strongly to encourage members of staff to deal themselves with any trouble they find, if it is not too serious, and to inform the duty member of staff and or the senior master if it is serious.

11. To assist the headmasters with the organisation of the school and policy making, with particular reference to the children's behaviour, the academic side of the school, and the management of the staff.

12. To be responsible for day to day disciplinary matters.

13. To stimulate awareness of an objective justification of standards of behaviour for staff and children in the form of explicit regular reminders.

14. In the light of the above, to ensure that the headmasters and staff do not leave too many disciplinary concerns entirely to the senior master. The

senior master's job would be as much to help the headmasters and staff act effectively, as it would be to help the children to do so; but in doing this he would have to be careful he did not let staff and headmasters evade responsibilities.

My Impressions of Some of the Outcomes of the Introduction of the Senior Master Whom I Recommended. August 1990.

The following comments are numbered to correspond with my suggestions in my undisciplined thoughts on the idea of a senior master, 5/5/86.

1. Extra stage

My nominee has provided an extra stage as an authority to whom staff can appeal over matters of discipline. Unlike the headmaster he supports the staff well.

However, some of the more junior staff have found him difficult to approach, partly because they find that he points out what he considers their faults in a rather patronising way.

**Variety of Standards and Practices of Staff**

Generally his manner with staff has been awkward. He has found it hard to accept the variety of standards and practices of staff as phenomena to which to attend tactfully, and he has irritated senior staff when commenting on their actions, partly because he has an awkward manner and partly because some feel he is not naturally as good as they are. Several feel he is too aggressive with the children and too abrasive with the staff.

## 2. Measure of consistency

He has tried to provide a measure of consistency and commonality of standard, to a small extent by patrolling the school, but mainly through general comments at staff briefings and meetings. This has not had a noticeable effect as far as I can see.

a). I would like to see him assist the duty staff more, fairly intensively in the first fortnight of term, patrolling occasionally during the children's free time and, more particularly, during lunch time, unsupervised prep. time and when the boarding boys are going to bed. (The boarding girls are fewer in number and are very well supervised when they go to bed).

### **b) Meetings**

I would also like to see him arrange meetings at which staff could be advised collectively on disciplinary practice. He could encourage all his colleagues, but particularly perhaps those more senior, to contribute practical advice at these meetings, as well as advising himself. If he made a point of involving his senior colleagues respectfully, this might reduce some of the tension which results from competition between him and them.

I feel the meetings I suggest in b) could provide an opportunity for useful practical advice to be exchanged, and the assistance to the duty staff in a) could be a time for practical demonstration, by the senior master, of method and standard. Clearly he would have to co-operate carefully and sensitively with individual staff. If he continued this assistance irregularly and less intensively after the first fortnight, the constant possibility of his appearance would provide an extra tension on the children and the

duty staff.

### 3. Patrolling

He has kept watch to a small extent on the general level of behaviour. I would like to see this increased in accordance with what I have said in and about 2a) and b).

He has done some patrolling of the school supporting the duty masters during free time, during prep. times which are not supervised by a member of staff sitting in each form room, and at lunch time, but not as much as I think is necessary.

#### **After Breakfast**

A particularly important time in my view is that between breakfast, which finishes at about 8.00 a.m. and morning assembly at 8.20 a.m. This is a time which has no official supervision because the day time duty staff do not start until 8.20 a.m. When the children come out of breakfast they are full of energy and can easily expend this in an excessively boisterous way instead of sorting themselves out for the day ahead.

The senior master where I was at school patrolled an equivalent time zealously and to good effect. He encouraged children to prepare themselves for the day: to do some work or to sort out their belongings. He strongly discouraged boisterous behaviour and the playing of games such as cards at this time.

#### **Patrolling of Prep.times**

The new senior master has helped duty staff patrol evening preps. but only just a little and very infrequently. These preps. need much vigilance because

the children work in their separate form rooms without adult supervision or that of senior children. Many of the assistant staff do not seem to me to realise how much supervision these preps. require from the duty staff, particularly to quieten the children at the beginning when, again, they are full of energy because they have just had their supper. More help from the senior master at this time would be beneficial, particularly for the weaker staff, and his appearance as one checking up would provide more stimulus for the more idle staff. Unfortunately though, the senior master's appearances at evening prep. times have become less and less, more noticeably so since the arrival of his first child. However, I suggest that if he made regular appearances for the first fortnight of each term, he would be able to inform himself more of what went on under different duty staff and hence impose a greater commonality of standard.

#### **Bed Time**

Another time which would benefit from some intensive attention from the senior master at the beginning of term, and from then on through periodic maintenance visits, is that when the boarding boys go to bed. This happens in stages. The juniors finish their preps. first and then go to bed, then the middle school goes a bit later and then the seniors later still.

The juniors start going to bed at 7.20 p.m. but the duty house master, who is on call all night, does not come on duty until 8.30 p.m. The period of washing and getting to bed is supervised by matrons, amongst the younger ones of whom there is a fairly regular turnover. Not unexpectedly the younger matrons often lack the control required to be able to cope with the children at this fairly fraught time. Again there seems to be a need here for standards to be established

and maintained by a senior member of staff with authority.

#### **4. Support for the duty staff**

Again, my comments here are in accordance with those I have made in and about 2a) and b).

#### **5. Disciplinary System**

He has instituted and co-ordinated a considerably more comprehensive disciplinary policy.

##### **Plus and Minus Marks**

In order to fill the gap between the noisy and, or late marks for trivial offences, and the conduct marks for serious offences, he introduced a system of minus marks for poor behaviour and plus marks for commendable behaviour such as helpfulness, (The plus marks can not cancel out minus marks).

The minus marks count against, and the plus marks in favour of, the child's patrol. The school is divided in to four houses and there are four patrols within each house. Prestige and prizes in the form of edible rewards provide incentives, for patrols fortnightly, and for houses termly, to win the least number of minuses and/or the most pluses competition.

##### **Detention**

As regards individual children, four minus marks in a fortnight lead to an hour's detention, and six lead to 2 hours. A conduct mark amounts to six minuses.

The new senior master introduced periods of deten-

tion which take place twice weekly, in free time on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and which are supervised either by him or one of the two headmasters.

### **The Extension of the System**

The extension of the system has provided a means by which staff can punish children without giving themselves extra work. However, some staff feel that the more persistent offenders regard detention, in which they are required to write out the school rules repeatedly, as rather innocuous. Also the delay between offences and punishment is deemed by some staff to reduce the efficacy of the punishment. Consequently some staff have punished children by giving them lines to write out within a time limit, pressurising the children to use odd, short periods of free time which they may well value more highly than the longer periods which occur twice weekly on half holidays. This practice has brought some complaints from parents to the headmaster who seems to have sympathised with them to some extent. The fact that the complaints arose suggests to me that the punishments had some effect which seems to be in their favour.

### **Dissatisfaction With Attitudes**

However, the extensions to the penal system made by the senior master are generally regarded by staff to have made an improvement, but there is still by no means satisfaction with the attitudes and level of respect shown by the children. The distinction and connections between attitudes and respect on one hand, and the children's behaviour on the other, is significant and a source of some confusion in this issue; hence I referred to this in more detail on pages 388-392.

## 6. Tutors

Each child has a tutor who monitors the child's academic and social progress for his or her last three years in the school. All senior members of the teaching staff, except the headmaster and assistant headmaster are tutors, each to a group of about 10 children. The children have a tutorial once a week when the tutor looks at their work grades and considers any other feedback there may be on the child's tutor's card or in the tutors' book. Being a tutor thus involves an extra commitment which includes writing a comprehensive report on each tutee at the end of each term. Before the assistant headmaster became such, he had been a tutor.

The new senior master has remained a tutor which I think is a good thing because he has not been seen by other staff to withdraw from a considerable commitment to children. A common criticism of the headmasters is that they too readily take opportunities to withdraw from dealing directly with children.

He has co-operated with tutors informally to a small degree. There is a tutors' book in which members of staff may comment on children for the benefit of their tutors who are expected to check the entries, which are made voluntarily, once a week in time for tutors' time. I would like to see the senior master supplement this system by informing staff, at the weekly staff meetings of children causing concern. I would also like to see him try to elicit comments from those staff who are less inclined to write them down. I have to confess that I am one of those who are less inclined to write comments down in the tutors' book.

### **Comment of August 1991**

Since the 1991 initiative the senior master has informed staff at the weekly meetings of children causing concern, and he has elicited comments. This has been generally regarded as helpful.

He has conferred with the headmasters over behavioural matters, but I understand from him that the difference in their expectations has been an obstacle to some extent.

### **7. Practical guidance**

He has not attended to this.

#### **Comments of August 1991**

Since the 1991 initiative we have begun to offer practical guidance in the form of lists of useful techniques and awareness for staff and for senior children.

I should like to see the senior master gain access to the patrol leaders' meetings, and offer advice and guidance at these.

### **8. Enquiry in to practice**

This he has not done.

#### **Comment of August 1991**

During the meetings, which resulted from the 1991 initiative, it was agreed that this should take place, though what form it would take would depend on how it developed. It was considered there was not time to start during the summer term but it was resolved to make a start during the Autumn term of 1991.

## 9. Setting general standards

He has presided over and improved "line-ups" which are short secular assemblies in the main hall for dealing with daily routine matters immediately before the children go in to morning chapel; they used to be poorly controlled by the assistant headmaster. The new senior master has not attempted to control the other times. I have explained elsewhere how he might set and maintain general standards more effectively.

## 10. Being available to have children sent to him

He has been available for this but his institution of the system of minuses in the patrol competition has largely obviated the staff's need for someone to whom children can be sent.

## 11. Organisation

He has helped a little with organisation and policy making but not as much as he would have liked. He has not been admitted to the same level as the assistant headmaster. He resents this and is probably consequently more abrasive in relation to the assistant headmaster than he would be otherwise.

### **Assistant Headmaster**

The assistant headmaster organises and administers all aspects of the school which directly concern children, except for disciplinary matters. He is a member of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, as most prep. school headmasters are; the senior master is not. The assistant headmaster attends governors meetings - whereas the senior master does not - and he is clearly a close confidant and ally of the headmaster. The headmaster is less able at grasping

detail and complexity, and clearly relies on the assistant headmaster to work things out, and also explain them at meetings. The headmaster and assistant headmaster are both members of the evangelical group, whereas the senior master is not.

### **Invovlement In High Level Organisation**

Almost certainly it would improve the senior master's morale if his status were raised by his being more involved in high level organisation, but I feel sure this will not come about because the headmaster and assistant headmaster would not wish to put themselves in a position where they could be influenced by him more, and they would not want him to have access to more information than is now the case because more information would give him more power to comment and influence.

### **Different Types**

The headmaster and assistant headmaster are of a different type from the senior master. They are prep. school, public school and Oxford educated. They have taught in prep. schools only, and they are both members of the evangelical fraternity. The senior master is not prep. school, public school and Oxbridge educated; he has taught in the state and the private sector; he is not a member of the evangelical fraternity, and appears to have little interest in religion. He is officially qualified as a teacher whereas the two headmasters are not.

The senior master would like to feel closer to the establishment of the school but, given these differences between him and the headmasters, and the fact that the governors are almost entirely of the same broad type as the headmasters, it is very unlikely that

he will ever be so.

## **12. Responsibility for day to day disciplinary matters**

As regards disciplinary matters he has concerned himself in a committed way with what he has come across but he has not made the structured effort at greater vigilance which I would like to have seen.

The duty master or mistress, who is primarily responsible for the discipline throughout the day, has been able to refer to him when necessary instead of referring to the assistant headmaster or headmaster. This has relieved the headmasters which has been good because neither could cope with the discipline as well as doing the rest of his job, and so both tended to shy away from dealing with disciplinary matters. As the senior master seems more committed to resolving disciplinary concerns, has more time to do so, and wants to improve the system, the existing arrangement is considerably preferable to that which obtained before.

### **Difficulty**

However, there is a difficulty here which is probably all the greater because of the differences in suppositions and hence expectations of the senior master on one side and the headmaster and assistant headmaster on the other. The headmaster is regarded as ultimately responsible for the tone of the school, but he leaves the "dirty work" of the day-to-day discipline to the senior master. The senior master, however, does not have the same official authority as the headmaster, and, though he has plenty of punitive powers - such as his minus system and detention at his disposal - he does not have the same access to, and hence relationship with, the senior children as the headmaster does.

The headmaster is in a position to cultivate a relationship with the senior children which is much closer than that of any other member of staff. He does this primarily through the patrol leaders meetings to which the senior master has not gained access. The headmaster officially appoints the patrol leaders - though the appointments are discussed in staff meetings - so the patrol leaders are inclined to see the headmaster as the source of the prestige and privilege they enjoy. He is also in a position to provide treats for them.

### **Patrol Leaders' Privileges**

Many staff, including me, feel that the patrol leaders when first appointed should not enjoy all their ultimate privileges until they have proved themselves. They have to wait to be confirmed as permanent appointees-usually this happens at the half term of their first term in office- but they enjoy all their privileges from the beginning. Their confirmation is discussed in a staff meeting, so there is theoretically an opportunity for input from all the staff, but the final decision is inevitably affected by the expectations of the headmaster and his apparent inclination to curry favour with the senior children and also their parents.

### **Too Matey; Conflict of Expectations**

Both the senior master and I consider that the headmaster is too matey with the senior children. For example, I was surprised when I first heard him greet them by saying "high". We also feel he does not expect enough from them in the way of helpful and responsible behaviour. He has revealed evidence of his suppositional state by telling the staff, when they have asked for higher expectations, that we have to remember that

the children are only thirteen. This implies that he knows that thirteen year old children have limits and, more significantly, that he knows what these are. Most of the staff feel that children of the same age at other schools are more responsible and more mature in outlook. I take this view, and I think that the quality of life in our school could be greatly improved if the senior children were more mature in mind, and behaved more responsibly. However, given the characteristics of the present headmaster, I feel that such an improvement would be practically impossible to bring about, certainly from the position I am in as an assistant member of staff, and almost certainly from the position of the senior master.

I suggest that the interaction that the headmaster has with the senior children provides an important feedback path as regards the discipline and tone of the school, but, because of the headmaster's unique position and relationship with the children, there is no means of other staff affecting this significantly.

There is a temptation to think that the level of maturity and responsible behaviour of the senior children is the result of characteristics of the school which are entirely independent of the headmaster. This is because the senior children were similarly regarded by the staff, many of whom were the same, under the previous headmaster. However, the previous headmaster was generally regarded by the staff as weak as far as his expectations of the senior children were concerned. Hence the present headmaster inherited a situation which was similar to that which obtains now. I suggest that this is mainly because the present headmaster is, though otherwise a very different man, of similar mind to the previous headmaster as far as the expectations of the senior children are concerned.

### 13. Objective justification

By this I meant reminders to the children at daily assemblies so that the staff could justify some of their disciplinary measures to the children by referring to what the senior master had said. Unfortunately though, very few staff- sometimes none- attend the assembly, called line-up, over which the senior master presides, so there has been a negligible effect as far as the staff have been concerned.

The senior master uses this assembly to remind and, not infrequently, to scold the children collectively. This must have some effect as a form of feedback, but unfortunately he seems to have got in to a state of frustration. This seems to be making him more aggressive with the result that some children fear him to the point of despising him, while some others regard him as a joke. His aggression appears to be aimed directly at the children and at the same time indirectly at the headmaster and his assistant; it seems his disapproval of the two headmasters he takes out on the children.

#### **Comment of August 1991**

The senior master has demonstrated this frustration and anger much less in the past year, and he has generally conducted himself with a much improved level of dignity and composure.

#### **Unsuccessful Applications**

I know that the senior master is frustrated and angered by the headmasters. His frustration is, I think, increased because he has been unsuccessful in recent applications for headmasterships.

### He Might Avoid Being Personal

I have told him that I think he would be better advised to try to avoid becoming so personal directly with the children and indirectly with the headmasters. His response was that he could not avoid being personal because personal issues were arising because our system was allowing several unpleasant characters to develop amongst the children. When he said this I felt I could not help any more at the time because I could not see any way of helping him out of the interactive system in which he seemed to be trapped. I am still at a loss, but I am still concerned about him because I feel that the state in which he is is damaging to his practice and, potentially at any rate, to his health.

### **Comment of August 1991**

Since I wrote the above a year ago, things have improved as I have already indicated. I am no longer worried about this. I do not pretend that in conflict with children I do not sometimes become cross with them personally and in some cases at the same time feel cross with their parents and or the headmaster. However, because I am aware that in cases like these I can, if not careful, become involved in conflict over concerns about which I can do nothing, or, at any rate, very little, I suggest I am better prepared to cope. I am in a better position to curtail my involvement through the knowledge that getting cross is bound not to be constructive but rather, in many cases, destructive. If I do make a mistake, I am now, I suggest, better able to look back at the conflict, understand something about how it arose, and hence better prepared to cope the next time the potential for conflict develops.

### **Not Always Bad To Get Cross**

I am not saying here that it is always a bad thing to get cross with children. I believe it is good for them to learn that people get cross, simply because people do. However, I am saying that it is as well to be aware of the possibility of there being various levels of conflict and that there is often potential for conflict to raise itself to new levels different from, and with potential for, disturbance greater than that of the original issue. Hence there is a potential for conflict to escalate out of proportion to the original issue. Watzlawick calls this type of conflict in an interactive system a symmetrical schism.

### **Escalation From Content Level to Context Level**

In such situations it is not uncommon for people to get cross with others partly for reasons other than those which have initiated the immediate conflict. Further, if neither party to a conflict submits or withdraws, the interaction has a tendency to be self escalating, each party being controlled by positive feedback, unless one or both of the parties have the ability to step outside the interactive system.

### **I Sympathise With the Senior Master's Frustrations**

I sympathise with much of the frustration and irritation which the senior master seems to suffer but I feel I am better able to cope with what happens to me; I believe this to be partly the result of my carrying out this enquiry

#### **14. Not all to be left to the senior master**

The introduction of his system of minus marks has meant that the staff and headmasters have an easily ap-

plied punitive system so that they do no have to refer to the senior master except in serious cases. However, the senior master does seem to feel that he is bearing the brunt of trying to set the tone of the school, largely in vain because of the expectations of the headmasters and the weaknesses of some staff. I have already suggested some of the things I feel he could do to improve the situation; but these I will summarise along with some other ideas, below.

Summary Of New Action I Suggest The  
Senior Master Take

August 1990

A. Instigate seminary/instructional sessions for staff on expectations and techniques in regard to discipline, inviting all staff, but particularly the senior members, to contribute. Such a session to take place before or near the beginning of each term.

**Comment, August 1991**

As a result of the 1991 initiative enough groundwork has been done for this to go ahead.

B. Together with the headmaster, to instigate a system of guidance for new staff by the allotment of a senior member of staff to each to look after him or her.

C. To patrol with the duty staff, fairly intensively for the first fortnight of each term, and infrequently thereafter, during evening preps and going to bed times.

**Comment August 1991**

I have not mentioned this to him since, and it has not happened.

D. To patrol the time between breakfast and chapel, and also to patrol other free times occasionally

**Comment August 1991**

I have taken on patrolling the time after breakfast. I have not mentioned the other times, and nothing new has happened.

E. At the weekly staff meeting to co-ordinate feedback of some of the information about children that does not get written in the tutors' book

**Comment August 1991**

This began as a result of the 1991 initiative; it has been generally considered a great help.

F. To gain access to the patrol leaders' meetings to contribute instruction to the patrol leaders and try to raise the expectations of them. (In public the headmaster and assistant headmaster seem to defer to the senior master as regards expectations)

**Comment August 1991**

Access to the patrol leaders' meetings has not been gained but work has begun on ways of involving other staff more, including general meetings of staff and patrol leaders and staff assistance of patrol leaders with disciplinary techniques. A list of techniques is to be offered to the patrol leaders for the first time in September 1991. All this results from the 1991 initiative.

G. To instigate with the headmaster that all staff be present at one of the two morning assemblies- most staff attend neither at the moment.

(The present routine is that, after a staff briefing session at 8.15 a.m., a short secular assembly at 8.20a.m. immediately precedes a short chapel service at 8.30a.m.) I suggest that all staff, having received and or provided feedback at the briefing session in the staff room then move next door to the main hall to attend the short secular assembly over which the senior master presides.

**Comment August 1991**

I suggested this to the headmaster in the summer holidays of 1990. He agreed with the idea in principle but said he felt he would not be able to get the staff to attend. At the beginning of the following term he said at the first staff meeting he wanted all staff to attend the chapel service on Mondays; but nothing changed, and he never mentioned it again.

I did not refer to this idea during the meetings of the 1991 initiative because I realised it was very unpopular with many staff.

General suggestions that do not concern the senior master alone.

H. That the form teacher's time with his or her form- a ten minute supervisory period- should take place after chapel, before morning lessons, instead of after the last lesson in the afternoon. The form teacher to be provided with a check list to remind her or him to check particular points such as: i) tidiness of children ii) tidiness of desks iii) tidiness of form rooms iv) readiness of the children for the day- e.g. that they have: pencils, rubbers, pens, blotting paper, books etc.

### **Comment, August 1991**

This was generally approved during a meeting following the 1991 initiative. There are timetabelling difficulties and, though they are not insurmountable, I have a feeling the headmasters will use them as an excuse to leave things as they are, simply to save quite a lot of "juggling" around. However I believe such a change would be desirable because I feel the day would have a better start.

### **Comments, August 1992**

This has now been instituted to good effect

### **Tutors**

That all children who have a tutor should not have just one but two tutors. One should be the main tutor and function as the present one does. The other should be a secondary tutor who would not be required to give the child a weekly tutorial, though he or she would be a main tutor to the standard number of other children. He or she would be required to sign the child's tutor's card weekly though. Hence he or she would be in a position to exercise control on the child and also the child's main tutor. There are sufficient staff at present for each child to have a tutor of each sex. (I like the idea of each child having two members of staff to regard as being in loco parentis because it increases their chances of having someone to whom they can relate.)

### **Comment 1991**

No progress has been made on this yet, but related ideas were considered, such as: encouraging children to consult staff other than their tutors if they felt a

need, and, considering changing children's tutors, by mutual agreement, if and when appropriate.

#### **Action which can be seen to be being taken**

I have tried to suggest action which can actually be seen to be being taken, as opposed to suggesting that staff be asked to change their behaviour generally, because it is my experience that the latter course does not work.

"A," page 452, seems of prime importance because it encourages policy to be generated amongst the staff and headmasters

#### **I Have No Control Over the Skill of Others**

I suggest these proposals would improve the situation if implemented skilfully. I have no control over the skill which is exercised. That is why I have tried to suggest practical routines which themselves might have an informing and controlling function which might have an improving effect partly independent of the level of skill with which they were carried out. In other words the institution of the new routines would constitute a change in organisation which might effect a change in functioning.

#### **Suggestions Would Be Welcomed**

I think my suggestions would be welcomed by the staff because, although the level of discipline is considered to be better than it was before the senior master was appointed, there is a feeling that things could still be considerably improved.

## **Comment August 1991**

Many of these suggestions have been made, as a result of the 1991 initiative, and welcomed.

Most of the concerns of staff seem to have been more about the attitudes of children than their behaviour. I referred elsewhere to the relative intractability of attitudes.

My supposition is that it is better to try to attend to behaviour and hope that "good" attitudes will eventually form as good habits.

### **A poor group of senior boys 1990**

The attitudes of the senior boys have recently (Summer term 1990) concerned me particularly.

Silliness and lack of motivation to succeed have been particularly evident to me when I have been coaching the 1st XI cricket team. There has been very little that could easily be pin pointed as bad behaviour but there has been some immensely irritating and frustrating silliness and poor co-operation. In almost every case this seems to have been irritatingly contrived to have been almost out of range of my senses. This has not happened to me before. I have coached the 1st XI for many years and enjoyed some successful seasons, invariably with well motivated, enthusiastic children.

### **Other Staff Have Complained**

Other members of staff have complained of similar experiences. I have complained about all this to the headmaster and senior master. Both have said that we have had a disappointing group at the top of the

school. I agree with this but I am not prepared to accept it because I think that our system could be organised in such a way that it would not allow a "bad" group to develop so badly.

The headmaster's view was that little could be done.

The senior master thought that the situations could be improved but that much depended on the headmaster.

#### **Comment August 1991**

I am glad to be able to report that the cricket season of 1991 was a vast improvement on that of 1990.

#### **The assistant headmaster's resignation to an attitude problem**

The assistant headmaster revealed his resignation to what I perceive as an attitude problem amongst the senior children when he announced, at a staff meeting last term, Summer 1990, that this year the leaving children would not have lectures from members of staff included in their post examination programme because they could not be relied upon to behave satisfactorily. Behaviour at the lectures the previous year had not been good, so, given the record of the current group, it was expected to be far worse this year. One member of staff- the heavy handed man- said that this was rather an indictment of our system, but otherwise the staff seemed to accept the decision without comment.

#### **My discussion with the headmaster**

I was particularly concerned about this state of affairs so I asked to discuss it with the headmaster

after the end of term. I made some proposals for change, some of which I would be able to implement myself. I do not suppose that attitudes can easily be changed by coercion. I do suppose, though, that if we raised levels of behaviour generally - mainly by eliminating much of the sloppy behaviour, through closer supervision - eventually better attitudes would result.

### **My Proposals**

1. That I should be on duty everyday for the quarter of an hour between breakfast and staff information time.

#### **Comment August 1991**

This was agreed and I have fulfilled this function for the past year: it does not seem to have achieved a great deal.

2. That I should help supervise the boys going to bed.

#### **Comment August 1991**

This was not accepted.

3. That I should provide feedback on 1. and 2. at staff information time when appropriate.

#### **Comment August 1991**

This was not accepted.

4. That all the staff together would attend one of the two assemblies in the morning.

**Comment August 1991**

I have already described the eventual ineffective compromise on this.

5. That there should be discussion/guidance sessions for staff on discipline.

**Comment August 1991**

This is developing as already described.

6. That form teachers' time should take place in the mornings, after assemblies, as opposed to at the end of the day.

**Comment August 1991**

This was instituted at the beginning of the Autumn term, 1991.

7. That form teachers be provided with a check list to remind them of points to monitor.

**Comment August 1991**

Pending

8. That tutors be offered a check list to remind them of points to monitor. I knew that one of the tutors had a scheme which worked well for him personally and which he was keen to offer to the other tutors.

**Comment August 1991**

This took place at the beginning of the Autumn term 1991 but it did not seem the ideas were widely acclaimed or adopted.

## **My Main Intentions**

My main intention behind these proposals was to influence the headmaster and senior master to do some of these things themselves.

### **Discussions**

I discussed the proposals with the headmaster, senior master and senior housemaster and made it clear that I was not expecting any extra pay for carrying out any of my suggestions. The senior housemaster was much in favour; the other two were less enthusiastic and made several references to the fact that we had had a particularly poor group at the top of the school. I felt they had lacked enthusiasm partly because they saw my suggestions as criticisms of the systems over which they were presiding.

A private hope of mine was that the headmaster and senior master would carry out some of my proposals or I would be invited to do so myself.

### **The essence behind the proposals**

The essence behind the proposals is increased vigilance: vigilance to inform, and vigilance to control. I thought that if I carried out some of my recommendations myself, I might exert a greater tension on the headmaster and senior master by keeping them informed and by showing them how things could be improved through greater vigilance.

I thought the headmaster would welcome my proposals because they provided a means of his being more informed about what was going on in the system without his having to make much extra effort. However,

because on a previous occasion he had shown himself unconcerned about becoming more informed about what was happening - that was with regard to the separate issue of academic work - perhaps I should have realised that he did not feel the need to be as informed as I felt he should be. This is a case of his suppositions about the degree to which he need be informed being different from mine.

### **Basic Ideas Informing**

Behind my proposals is the basic idea: that for control to be effective, it has to be based on good information; hence, it behoves whomsoever is at the head of the organisation to devise efficient means, which do not tax the functioning too much, of informing her or himself of what is happening in the organisation.

### **The headmaster's decisions**

The headmaster had said that he would consider my proposals and let me know his decision before the beginning of term. He did not do this. He apologised for informing me at the first staff meeting of term that he accepted that I should do a duty between breakfast and chapel. He also asked if all staff could try to attend the chapel assembly on a Monday morning when he would make announcements about the coming week. Also tutors were to be offered a check list. All this meant that as regards my proposals only 1. and 8. had been accepted in full. The encouragement of staff to attend Monday chapel assembly went no way towards a compromise for proposal 4.

### **Comment August 1991**

The staff ignored the headmaster's request that they should attend Monday assemblies, and the head-

master did not mention it again.

### A Difficulty

A difficulty for me as regards my effectiveness as regards general policy throughout the time under enquiry has been that in no case have I had any official power to effect change. It has always been a case of my trying to influence someone else to do things as I would like them to be done. For my influence to be that effective is of course practically equivalent to impossible. Nevertheless, if I actually held the power and responsibility, I would still have to try to get others to put my ideas into practice.

### Discipline and Behaviour (continued) July 1991

#### Concerns of Summer 1990

Last summer, 1990, I and many other staff, were particularly concerned about the poor behaviour and attitudes of many of the senior children, mainly boys, in the school.

Last August I reported making some suggestions to the headmaster. Only one of these: my being on duty daily between 8a.m. and 8.15a.m. when the children are free between breakfast and chapel was accepted. However, I have to admit that this by itself has, not unexpectedly, had little effect. As the headmaster's concerns were at that time clearly not as great as mine, I resolved to hold back and wait for further complaints to arise from others apart from me. This occurred sooner than I had anticipated and from an unexpected source.

### End of Spring Term Staff Meeting 1991

For the staff meeting at the end of the Spring term 1991 the headmaster posted an agenda which included time for discussion of discipline and behaviour, apparently as a result of his own concern; this I found encouraging.

At the meeting, no firm recommendations for immediate action were made during the discussion, though considerable concern was shown. I offered no suggestion as I felt the matter needed more detailed examination and consideration. After the headmaster had rounded off the discussion - in my view far too inconclusively - some members of staff continued: this seemed an indication of the level of concern. I could see the headmaster was becoming impatient so I suggested we demonstrated our commitment to improving things by setting up a working party of volunteer staff, which I offered to chair, to consider some of the issues, during the holidays. This was approved and nine members of staff offered to help, straight after the meeting. Later on the headmaster and one other teacher became involved.

### Meetings During the Spring Holidays 1991

During the spring holidays of 1991 four meetings were held, and the discussions were continued periodically during the following term by the whole staff in staff meetings.

When the whole staff, which numbers about thirty, has met, we have found it beneficial to break in to smaller groups of around six, and then to reassemble as a whole to hear one from each of the smaller groups give a summary.

### The meetings

In the spring holiday meetings I felt it important that members of staff should have the opportunity to voice their concerns. However, I felt it appropriate, for the first time since starting this enquiry, to offer some of the theory and hence some of the language I have acquired through my enquiry. This I felt could only be done gently lest the staff felt I was adopting an approach which was too theoretical and divorced from reality.

### The main theme

My main theme throughout the discussions was that it was my belief that in order to cope with what was happening more effectively we needed more information about it, and, to control it more satisfactorily we needed to think in terms of feedback.

### Records of the meetings

I kept a record of the meetings and the papers I produced for them. These follow below in a section entitled "Discipline, Spring 1991: a new initiative." Discipline, Spring 1991: a new initiative.

### A Summary of Events From 16th March 1991 Onwards

#### Meetings

Saturday 16th March

End of term staff meeting: persistent offenders and bullying discussed at the headmaster's suggestion; concerns raised by members of staff; DH suggested a demonstration of commitment by setting up longer term enquiry; this agreed by the headmaster and confirmed

by him the following week.

Friday March 22nd

A meeting of five members of staff.

Thursday March 28th

A meeting of three of the staff from the previous week and four others, one of whom was the senior master.

Thursday April 4th

A meeting of five staff, one of whom had not been before.

Thursday April 11th

A meeting of eleven staff, one of whom had not been before, and the headmaster; the senior master was present.

Wednesday April 17th, 1991

A staff meeting at which "Proposals for action" were discussed.

Wednesday May 1st 1991

A staff meeting at which concerns about, and suggestions for, improving discipline were discussed in small groups of about six staff in number.

#### A Personal View for Discussion (paper)

This was written by DH for Friday 22nd March, and it was also offered on Thursday 28th March.

## General

1. Many perceptions of concerns; 2. many approaches to resolving; 3. levels at which concerns perceived: general discipline; more local discipline.

## My perceptions of concerns

1. persistent offenders; 2. poor level of behaviour in specific areas e.g. Junior Form and Third Forms; 3. poor attitudes of some to work: anti-work and "anti-swat" ethics; 4. rudeness, poor level of respect, bad manners, and poor attitudes towards staff and activities.

## My theory

My approach to attending to these concerns is based on an idea of feedback and control.

If an individual, or group, behaves in a certain way then that behaving is supported by positive feedback, e.g. pleasure, approval of peers, attention etc. and constrained by negative feedback. e.g. displeasure from being punished etc.

In order to modify the behaving we need to try to identify some of the supports. Some of these will be inside individuals' minds, e.g. beliefs and attitudes, and will therefore be relatively inaccessible. Others, such as peer approval and attention from staff, may be somewhat more accessible, and hence more easily controlled, but we also need to consider negative feedback, i.e. punishment.

Not initially paying close attention to individuals:

Some of my thoughts offered on Friday 22nd March 1991

I regard individuals as open organisations functioning within a series of larger organisations. My initial approach is not to look at particular individuals, whether they be children or members of staff, but to look at the larger organisations. A supposition of mine is that if we can improve the larger organisations then the smaller ones will be improved. I suggest we need to try to improve the larger organisations so that a moderate teacher can function satisfactorily within them.

Information

Information is essential to controlling what happens in an organisation. At the end of term staff meeting it seemed to me that a lot of information was conveyed too late.

Behaving is happening constantly; to be more controlled it needs more frequent monitoring. It is not possible to provide appropriate feedback without appropriate information.

A suggestion

Weekly behaviour assessments.

1. Weekly behaviour assessments to be entered into a book similar to the academic grades book. These grades to:

- i) range from / = satisfactory or above, through D to E (and onwards if necessary);
- ii) be awarded weekly by subject teachers, as academic grades are now, and also by houseparents,

matrons and games teachers;

- iii) focus on co-operation, disrespect, bad manners and poor attitudes;
- iv) be considered weekly at staff meetings and particularly bad cases discussed;
- v) not be fed back to the children except in particularly bad cases.

2. Children with poor grades to be put on a behaviour report card.

3. Behaviour report cards to be bigger than work report cards so that more could be written on them and they would be more difficult to lose.

4. Behaviour report cards to be signed daily by tutor, form teacher, senior master and headmaster.

DH's Summary of the Previous Meeting on Friday 22nd March 1991 Proposed Agenda for Thursday 28th March 1991

Concern

Concern arose at the last meeting, on Friday 22nd March, over a need for an effective instant punishment

Proposed agenda

1. My summary of meeting of Friday 22nd March.
2. Brief comments from others who were present on 22nd March.
3. Brief consideration of how we might run this meeting: agenda etc.
4. et seq. to be decided.

My summary of a meeting of five members of staff on Friday 22nd March 1991

**Preamble**

1. i) many different approaches to resolving concerns;
- ii) many different levels at which approaches could be made;
- iii) perhaps useful to look at control in terms of negative and positive feedback.

**Concerns**

2. Some concerns: (a) (i) persistent offenders/disturbed children; (ii) more general misbehaving beyond tolerable level in some areas; (iii) rudeness/disrespect, bad manners, poor attitudes/poor work ethic; (b) absence of an effective instant punishment; (c) time: (i) need to make clearer priorities (ii) too much activity? (d) too many chiefs, particularly in the games area, leading to confusion over priorities.

## **Suggestions**

3. Some suggestions: to be able to provide feedback we need more frequent informing:

- (i) weekly behaviour assessment grades from lessons, games and dormitories: to be discussed weekly, first item at staff meetings, bad grades leading to behaviour report cards;
- (ii) amalgamation of credits system and patrol competition;
- (iii) improved description of all staff roles as regards discipline: more reminders;
- (iv) more guidance for staff, better supervision of inexperienced staff; perhaps, not too infrequently, seminary/guidance session on practical disciplinary techniques for staff; tapping experience and expertise of members of staff: similar sessions for senior children (WHEN THOUGH?);
- (v) at staff meetings: children, and other items which concern all staff, to be considerable first; all staff concerned with care to attend if possible;
- (vi) perhaps tutors to be encouraged to investigate anti-work ethics with a view to interrupting positive feedback loops between particular bad lads and lasses and "the lads" or "the lasses".

## **Short and Long Term**

4. It would probably be better to think in terms of shorter and longer term resolutions.

Summary of a Meeting on Thursday 28th March 1991, for  
Thursday 4th April 1991

Some ideas which were discussed

1. weekly behaviour assessments;
2. cultivating a greater sense of community;
3. staff meetings;
4. prevention approach to poor behaviour;
5. punishment;
6. long term strategy for skills;
7. discipline/self discipline;
8. tutors and tutees.

Summary

**1. Weekly Behaviour Assessments**

Comments: danger of too much information; the reporting would be imprecise; a question of: what do you do with the information, might arise; there should be caution about keeping records; if staff wrote down grades they might fear the grades might reflect on them; but, there might be some advantages in the routine, for staff and headmaster.

**2. Cultivating a Greater Sense of Community**

Comments: need to break down barriers between teaching and non-teaching staff: suggestion: badge day; everyone needs to feel more valued; something positive on discipline might be a workshop on discipline, including an initial attempt to reduce barriers; need to cultivate an environment in which criticism is acceptable; need for long term strategy centred around increasing self esteem of staff and children; need to share expertise - we all forget techniques.

**3. Staff Meetings**

Comments: a good idea if all staff concerned with

children attended the first part of each staff meeting; full staff meetings should take place weekly: good idea to start each meeting by looking at children, and focusing on behaviour.

#### **4. Prevention Approach**

Comments: twelve children named - we know where they are a problem.

Suggestion: perhaps give offenders a change of tutor; if we agree everything stops for discipline, should we send more children to the headmaster; need for more adults to children, particularly in the dormitories to stop peripheral bad behaviour; need for one person to oversee main house and fight for the boys; need to simplify the daily routine and "snap it up" a bit: reduce areas for breaks; need to cut down on what we do in order to do things more effectively, but, very difficult to reduce: perhaps make Long Breaks sacrosanct - may help but not a solution; perhaps confine offenders' activities; need for staff guidance on professionalism.

#### **5. Punishment**

suggestion: threaten exects - day children?

#### **6. Long Term Strategy for Skills**

Comments: perhaps we should examine the way we look at children, and the way we use our time, particularly in relation to the tutorial system; perhaps we should attempt to establish greater feelings of worth amongst children and staff, through the cultivation of a greater sense of community.

#### **7. Externally Imposed Discipline/Self Discipline**

Comments: children need freedom to develop self dis-

cipline, but self discipline is probably not acquired by children in the absence of externally imposed discipline.

#### **8. Tutors/Tutees**

Comments: important that tutees should be able to go to someone else if they feel they have a concern they cannot discuss with their tutor: alternative tutoring could be structured.

Suggestion for Practice: A Provisional Pilot Scheme.  
For Thursday 4th April 1991

Cautionary preface

1. We need more information about what concerns there are, and where, when and how they manifest themselves.
2. Much interest in, and concern for, discipline and associated subjects has been shown, and so the time seems right to consider taking some initiatives even if only as a means of maintaining impetus and gaining further information.
3. Any initiative we take needs to be seen as being part of a provisional pilot scheme, and therefore must include provision for frequent opportunities for review.

Proposals for action

1. Make a list of names of particular offenders.
2. Use the list as a focus for discussion at the beginning of each staff meeting, the list could be expanded or contracted.
3. All staff concerned directly with children to be asked to attend the first part of each staff meeting.
4. Children to be considered first at staff meetings.
5. Staff meetings to take place weekly, even if on occasions only to consider children in full meeting, and then, perhaps, to break up in to subject meetings.
6. Produce list of hints on practical disciplinary techniques for staff.
7. Institute weekly working suppers to discuss care/discipline, perhaps using list of techniques as a basis for some of the discussions.

8. Produce list of hints on practical disciplinary technique for patrol leaders and prefects.
9. Use list of practical hints as a basis for briefing patrol leaders and prefects on practical techniques in a meeting near the beginning of term; remind/reinforce and review in further, perhaps weekly, meetings during the term, perhaps in smaller groups so it's easier to talk; invite volunteers from all, teaching and non teaching, staff to help with these meetings.
10. Badge day.
11. Consider changing offenders' tutors.
12. Reduce area for short break to: climbing frames, upper tennis courts and front lawn.
13. Encourage tutors to investigate poor work/poor behaviour ethics pressure groups and bullying.
14. (Longer term) Consider how to cultivate a greater feeling of community; consider setting up opportunities for examining the way we look at children and the way we use our time, particularly in relation to the tutorial system; attempt to cultivate more self esteem in children and staff.

## Summary of a Meeting of Thursday 4th April 1991

### Initial general discussion

DH's summary of the meeting of Friday 22nd March 1991 was circulated, and general discussion arose. A recurring theme seemed to centre around concern about the complexity and intensity of the school day, its demands upon staff, and the added burden of care. Reviewing our use of time, and time and care seemed to be subjects we needed to consider over the longer term.

#### 1. Reviewing our use of time.

Theory offered in a T.V. programme: after 38 hours of work in a week whatever else you then do is unproductive: perhaps, therefore, we need to consider radical change over the longer term, though perhaps we don't need to be more radical than to say that all children do not need to be occupied all the time: children need free time to learn to amuse themselves: on the skiing expedition some of the seniors could entertain themselves, but the majority were lost unless they could go shopping, for sweets.

#### 2. Time and care.

Comments: partly with reference to the Main House, but mainly in regard to care generally, it was suggested that it was very difficult, if not impossible, to combine overall responsibility for the care of boarders, with full time teaching: teachers were in a position to say that it could not all be done; some of last week's suggestions might put more pressure on staff: perhaps problems don't arise so much in the classroom: perhaps we must look at ways of improving efficiency and cultivating more of a sense of purpose.

It seemed generally agreed that most of the substance of the above discussion needed detailed consideration over a longer term.

**Proposals for action: a provisional pilot scheme**

The paper with the above title was then circulated. The proposals were generally accepted with approval, though with the following reservations:

- a) proposal 4 could be time consuming, and so the discussion would have to be efficiently controlled, and restricted, probably, to no more than fifteen minutes;
- b) as regards numbers 8 and 9, it was requested that any suggestion of a psychological slant be avoided, and hints be restricted to simple common sense advice;
- c) as regards the badge day and cultivating a greater feeling of community: it was suggested that further discussion was necessary to consider how to go about these tactfully and without causing offence: the suggestion of "barriers" could be offensive to some, as they might not be aware of where, when and how, in particular cases, such abstract concepts might have origin: these remarks refer to proposals 10 and 14;
- d) as regards 11: this needed much care and sensitivity and perhaps could only be considered in cases where a particularly bad offender's tutor might welcome a rest from having to cope with this particular tutee: such a change could only be made with the agreement of the tutors and headmaster;
- e) as regards 12: this was not considered a pressing end, though it was thought that some reduction in area might help to get the children back to lessons on time.

### Punishment

It was noted that no ideas for an instant punishment had yet been forth-coming.

### Expulsion

At one stage in the discussion it was suggested that the school should feel no shame if it had to say to some particularly bad offenders that they could no longer remain in the school; the school could not be expected to cater for everyone, and expulsions in extreme cases might have a significant effect on general standards of behaviour.

## Some Thought on Recent Discussion and How to Proceed

### **General**

We have had three meetings so far. Their content and outcomes have been more seminal than directly practically applicable, but we have tried to make some provisional recommendations.

### Time for all staff to be involved

It seemed sensible to keep the discussion groups fairly small to begin with, so that the participants, who were volunteers - though not all entirely unsolicited, could develop their ideas at greater length. However, it now seems appropriate to try to involve more staff - preferably all - in some way.

The discussions have been positive, purposeful and enjoyable.

### Potential

Through the meetings I became aware that there is not only much concern for, and interest in, improving standards of behaviour and discipline, but also there is a wide range of relevant experience and expertise waiting to be tapped; most encouraging of all is the degree of motivation towards our trying to devise means of making improvements. All in all, it is clear, even at this stage prior to the whole staff being involved, that there is considerable potential available. I suggest we have an opportunity which should not be ignored.

### Inevitable difficulties

Throughout the discussions there has been maintained an awareness of an inevitability of there being inherent difficulties in attending effectively to concerns about discipline and behaviour; these difficulties arise for many reasons: some are the following:

- i) there can be many different perceptions of one concern;
- ii) there can be a range of levels at which different concerns may be perceived: some may be more general: others may be particular;
- iii) individuals seem to differ as regards their suppositions and presuppositions about what is desirable, and what is achievable and how it may be achieved.

### **Complex Living System**

However, perhaps the most significant reason for there being difficulty in dealing with this subject is illuminated by looking at the school as a complex living system.

Our concerns about discipline and behaviour have arisen in a complex system - the school - which maintains much of its identity as a result of having a life of its own which is perhaps what we mean if we were to say that the whole system is greater than the sum of its parts. The system's living is, I suggest, an inevitable concomitant of the complex multidimensional network of interacting within it; in other words it is an holistic phenomenon. Because the system, inevitably as a system, has an inherent propensity to resist change - i.e. maintain its identity - there is a multitude of measures which could be taken within it, in an attempt to effect change, which would have very little

consequence at all. (Perhaps this is why this subject has arisen for discussion at many an end of term staff meeting: in March 1980, September 1981 and March 1986 when much time was devoted to discipline and behaviour). However, there are plenty of ways in which effective and useful action could be taken, but before doing so, careful information gathering, and thinking are needed to try to get a better idea of what is happening, and how it is controlled - i.e. what the relevant feed back paths are.

### Feedback: examples

If some children are adopting a poor attitude to work partly because other influential children give them the impression that they think this is a good thing, then:

1. we need to know more about this - the children's tutors could, no doubt, elicit information;
2. we then need to try to extinguish the positive feedback which the demonstrators of this attitude are getting from those who are influencing them;
3. we then need to try to supply negative feedback, and further negative reinforcement, to try to reduce or eliminate the undesirable attitudes;
4. we also need to try to apply positive feedback - some sort of encouragement - for the desirable attitudes.

### Real life example

A real life example of a similar concern, which went unremedied, was described to me by one of my tutees. At the end of last term he told me that,

though he likes cricket, last season he was not alone in finding it impossible to be seen to be taking the game seriously, because of the pressure from the anti-cricket group in general - and one boy in particular - which was too strong to resist. (Some of us will remember, how one keen cricketer was reduced to tears by the anti-cricket group after he had played a commendably determined match saving innings).

Once the relevant feedback paths have been identified - some simple theory

Once the relevant feedback paths have been identified, adjustments in the information flow in the paths have to be made, or, stronger alternative paths containing remedial feedback need to be imposed. To make the modifications permanent, the means by which they are imposed have to be embodied in routines.

Similarly our approach to tackling our concerns about discipline and behaviour could be initially modified, in a general way, by our instituting, as a routine, weekly full staff meetings, attended by all staff concerned with care, at which behaviour and discipline were discussed as priorities.

Theories in general

I offer the idea of feedback and control in systems - of course there is nothing new about it - as a tool for thought which could provide a basis for an approach to some of our concerns. I suggest that at this stage we need to try to offer a few more ideas - some have already been forthcoming: i.e. the community idea, the prevention idea, and the idea of sharing skills - which might provide bases for our analysis of what is happening and what might be done to improve it.

Further difficulties, possible objections,  
and some suggestions

As regards our taking effective action as a group, further difficulties might be predicted on the ground of the inevitable partial closure of the thinking of each one of us.

We could point to parts of the closure in the thinking of a number of our colleagues as support for our believing that, as a group, we lack the capability to bring about improvement. But, we can not know we lack that capability.

I suggest we all need to try to open up our thinking to greater possibility; but we must remember that opening up our thinking will take time.

I suggest we need to look at the imposition of some routines which might facilitate our, and our colleagues', paying more attention to aspects of discipline, and hence, perhaps, help us all to act more effectively. We need to try to get away from thinking and saying things like: "If only so-and-so would think differently," and, instead, move more towards trying to devise routines which will help so-and-so act differently inspite of what she or he thinks.

How we might proceed

I suggest:

- i) We must establish whether or nor we wish to continue in our attempt to resolve some of our concerns.
- ii) If we wish to continue then we should try to agree to make it clear that we have no intention to "get at" any one of us, or put anyone of us under extra

pressure; our approach, in my view, should be to try to improve, by careful and sensitive adjustment, the climate in which we work; however, we must be aware that if some change is to occur, it probably can not do so without some conflict.

iii) If we agree to continue then we should look at simple measures which could be implemented immediately, and, at the same time set up routines which would enable us to maintain the impetus which has been generated.

If we wish to be effective over a longer term it is no good our thinking we can have a few meetings and make a few decisions and then all will be well. Rather, we need to set up some sort of continuous monitoring and reviewing process; our staff meetings can provide the basis for this, but I suggest we also set up a permanent study group or "think tank" - entirely voluntary but to which all staff would be welcome - to suggest and review policy.

We have to be prepared to be patient, we can not deal with all the future in the present.

#### My recommendations at this stage 9th April

As a means of opening up the discussion to the whole staff we should consider offering the following:

- i) adopting the "Proposals for action" put forward on Thursday 4th April;
- ii) an idea of a behaviour report card, including an idea of a 24 hour behaviour report card;
- iii) an idea of a permanent study group on behaviour and discipline;

iv) any more ideas agreed upon April 11th

All this should be offered with the reservation that we do not think that resolving our concerns would be simple, and with the assurances that no attempt would be made to "get at" or pressurise any one of us and that only entirely voluntarily would members of staff be expected to make a contribution.

**My commitment**

To demonstrate my commitment and concern, I offer to assist with, or, if required, co-ordinate all or any of the above and more. I do not claim exemplary expertise as regards discipline - far from it - but I do claim to care deeply about our concerns, and to have done so for at least fifteen years. During that time I have tried to give the matter considerable thought, but I have to confess I have not suggested many ideas which have been adopted.

## Summary of a Meeting on Thursday 11th April 1991

Ten members of staff and the headmaster and senior master were present.

1. The summary of the meeting of April 4th 1991 was generally approved.
2. We then looked at "How we might proceed"
3. We then considered the "Proposals for action"

### Proposals:

1. Make a list of names of particular offenders.
2. Use the list as a focus for discussion at the beginning of each staff meeting; the list could be expanded or contracted.
3. All staff concerned directly with children to be asked to attend the first part of each staff meeting.
4. children to be considered first at staff meetings.
5. Staff meetings to take place weekly, even if on occasions only to consider children in full meeting, and then perhaps, to break up into subject meetings.

The above were approved. It was suggested that spokespersons should be nominated for those staff who did not feel they wanted to speak at a full meeting.

6. Produce list of hints on practical disciplinary techniques for staff.

This was approved, and it was proposed that the list be worked at during the summer term, possibly in workshop sessions partly, and that all staff should be invited to contribute, voluntarily: some of those

present volunteered contributions.

7. Institute weekly working suppers to discuss care/discipline, perhaps using list of techniques as a basis for some of the discussion.

There were reservations about this, but it seemed generally considered that there was merit in the basic idea of our holding planned but informal discussion, which did not necessitate extra time being found.

8. Produce list of hints on practical disciplinary technique for patrol leaders and prefects.

This was approved with reservations similar to those made in respect of proposal 6.

9. Use list of practical hints as a basis for briefing patrol leaders and prefects on practical techniques in a meeting near the beginning of term; remind/reinforce and review in further - perhaps weekly - meetings during the term, perhaps in smaller groups so it might be easier to talk; invite volunteers from all, teaching and non-teaching, staff to help with these meetings.

This was approved, though again with the reservation that input from all staff be encouraged as regards list and meetings - again, list to be worked at during term.

10 Badge day.

This was approved with the reservation that the idea needed the support of some introductory preamble; it was suggested, with general approval, that this might take place two or three times per term.

11. Consider changing offenders' tutors. (This had been suggested to be considered only in cases of extremely difficult offenders whose tutors might welcome relief.)

It was suggested that cases could arise in which the child in question might find it easier to communicate with someone else - likewise as regards the tutor in some cases - but that the tutor in question should feel no inadequacy as difficulties in communicating were recognised phenomena; changes of tutors could only be made sensitively and with due consultation between tutors and headmaster.

12. Reduce area for short break to: climbing frames, upper tennis courts and front lawn.

It was suggested this might help to get the children back to lessons on time, but, on the other hand, their punctuality was perhaps the responsibility of the individual teachers receiving them for the next lessons. However, it was generally agreed that there was merit in looking at ways in which the children's scope could be a bit more restricted and simplified so that the opportunities for their taking advantage of different teachers' methods might be limited. Hence it was proposed we reconsidered the general idea; examples where restriction might be imposed were short break, and lunch time when possibly we might revert to having grace to begin with, all sit down and then be called to the hatch by tables: this, partly, to exchange unsupervised time in a queue for supervised time at a table. These proposals would probably be considered over the longer term.

13. Encourage tutors to investigate poor work/poor behaviour ethics pressure groups, and bullying.

This was approved and it was suggested that if the pressure groups' pressures exceeded tolerable limits then the information and hence requests to tutors might be forthcoming at weekly staff meetings. It was, however, pointed out that if tutees complained of pressure or bullying they would need guidance as to how to withstand it: we should not tackle the pressure, but also attempt to embolden the pressurised.

14. (Longer term) Consider how to cultivate a greater feeling of community; consider setting up opportunities for examining the way we look at children and the way we use our time, particularly in relation to the tutorial system; attempt to cultivate more self esteem in children and staff.

This was approved and again workshop sessions were suggested as a means of approaching this.

#### Other ideas which arose

##### Time

Again it was suggested that time was a major factor affecting what we did and how we did it. It was suggested that the children needed more time to do practical things informally with members of staff as these were times when they might be more inclined to be more relaxed and able to raise problems. We needed, it was proposed, to educate children to amuse themselves; the purpose of some hobbies should be that they could and probably would be pursued in the children's spare time. It was suggested, and generally approved for more consideration, that one games time per week might be devoted to this sort of thing.

### Immediate punishment/final sanctions

Before we ended it was pointed out that we still had not suggested any viable immediate punishment. Detention - same day - in Long Break was suggested and generally provisionally approved with the reservation that if a scheduled activity was to be missed the member of staff involved must be informed in advance to avoid any disrespect to him or her.

Minuses: the children probably cared less about these as they went up the school.

Final sanctions: these should perhaps be adaptable in order to be fitted to the child: perhaps no matches in some cases: perhaps no exeat more generally.

### What next

It was proposed that, at the staff meeting on April 13th, all the staff should be informed of the preliminary work which has been attempted, and that they should now be invited to contribute voluntarily. It was suggested that this summary be circulated and that at the staff meeting on April 17th the whole staff should consider the "Proposal for action," a previous discussion of which has been summarised above. It was also proposed that at the staff meeting on May 1st we should take the discussions further, perhaps looking at developing ideas about cultivating a greater sense of community, or developing our lists of techniques, perhaps in a workshop session.

At the end of the discussion it was agreed that we must try to maintain the impetus which we have generated, and we must be clear that if changes are to be effective over a long term they have to be linked to changes in, or additions to, structure which entail the

institution of new routines.

A Summary of Conclusions of a Discussion of the  
"Proposals for Action," Which Took Place in a Full  
Staff Meeting on Wednesday April 17th 1991

Summarised proposals with comments and recorded ap-  
proval where applicable:-

1. list of offenders: approved with the comment that perhaps we should look at why and how the offenders have acquired their minuses: this with a view to standardising - to some extent - punishments for particular offenders; it was suggested that feedback on this might from now on be forthcoming at our weekly staff meetings;
2. list as a focus: approved;
3. all staff concerned with children to attend first part of staff meetings:
4. children to be considered first at staff meetings: approved;
5. staff meetings weekly: approved;
6. list of practical disciplinary techniques for staff: approved, with the comment that it might be another aid to consistency;
7. weekly working suppers: general idea approved;
8. list of techniques for senior children: approved;
9. use of list of techniques as a basis for briefing patrol leaders...: approved;
10. badge day: approved with the recommendation that the reasons for it must be made clear;

11. tutors to consider as a contingency the exchanging of tutees in special cases where appropriate and with due discussion with the headmaster: approved, with the suggestion that alternative tutoring could be organised on a temporary basis, perhaps even to run concurrently with the usual tutoring;

12. reduce the area for short break: I have to confess I made no note about this, but I do not recall our discussing it;

13. tutors to investigate poor work/poor behaviour ethics pressure groups: approved, with the comment that we must use the Tutors' book more;

14. attempt at cultivating a greater feeling of community: general idea approved.

Also discussed:-

- i) behaviour report card: approved;
- ii) attempts to shame particular offenders: approved;
- iii) increase the rewards for good credit scores:  
perhaps reward with time e.g. excuse from a prep:  
general idea approved;
- iv) consider rewards and sanctions in relation to  
particular individuals; possible reward: choose  
video; possible sanctions: earlier bedtime,  
walkman withdrawal, reduction/removal of events  
(day children?) or matches.

Other ideas expressed:

- a) a pity to end lunch in silence;
- b) tutoring required much skill and hence perhaps there was a need for some preparation of, and guidance for, tutors;

- c) over the longer term we ought to look at ways of breaking chain of positive feedback for poor work/behaviour ethics, including giving attention to a concern about motivation by fear.

Some Suggestions for a List of Techniques  
for Discipline, April 21st 1991

Addressing groups

1. Insist on silence before instructions and information are given.
2. Use "stop talking and stand (or sit) still" as opposed to "quiet", or "silence".
3. Then use "listen carefully please".
4. If the response to 1. is not good, repeat, calmly but firmly.
5. If the response to 4. is not good, pick on someone, by name, calmly, but firmly and quite sharply, and punish if appropriate or ask to see them afterwards, again if appropriate. It is probably better to avoid giving out punishments to several individuals in front of a group because this can load the odds against whatever you want to do next; this depends on the context, clearly.
6. When silence established, try to convey instructions/information clearly and calmly and try to establish eye contact with a spread of individuals in some sort of rotation but not repeating the same cycle all the time; this not only can help to set up an interaction but it can also help maintain a sense of surveillance.

7. If anyone misbehaves, correct them by name, and then re-establish silence before proceeding.

8. Recapitulate information/instructions before moving to the next stage.

9. After group activity, debrief/assess session before dismissing.

10. Dismiss in small groups or individually.

11. Throughout any activity, try to resist any feeling of there being a pressure to rush on - it's better to get through a little work thoroughly in the beginning, and hence to set the tone, than to get through a lot chaotically.

#### **More general**

1. Get to lesson, game, meal or whatever before the children, if possible - it's easier to prevent trouble than to stop it.

2. If possible don't give children much time in a lesson etc. with nothing to do; don't give them many minutes - 5 to 10 maxima depending on age and apparent ability - just listening.

3. If there is a danger of whatever activity you wish to be carried out being too difficult for some or all the group, make sure you have a contingency plan. But, of course, don't compromise your expectations. Always have plenty for them to do.

4. If the need arises to correct a child in front of a group, avoid being drawn into prolonged conflict in front of the group; if you have to speak to a child individually, it's probably better to do it after the

session when the others have gone.

5. Try to avoid being irritated by children's facial expressions, unless they amount to obvious rudeness, they can be misleading.

6. Generally, avoid giving children options as to what they may do.

7. Avoid giving punishments which can not be fulfilled.

8. Avoid giving instructions which can not be fulfilled, e.g. instructions contradictory to, or in conflict with, other instructions already given.

9. Try to be discriminating as regards which misdemeanours you choose to correct; you cannot correct everything, so try to establish priorities; pretending not to notice some things is a useful skill.

10. Avoid sarcasm and humiliating.

11. Initially, when addressing children, try not to use language and tone which imply expectations of misbehaviour, inattention, disrespect, carelessness etc. if the children sense such behaviour is expected they can be inclined to behave as though it is expected.

12. Avoid chancing your arm by requesting silence and attention when it is practically very difficult if not impossible to achieve (e.g. when patrol leaders are legitimately checking up at line up).

## On duty

### 1. Going into chapel:

- i) be there first;
- ii) stand somewhere where the children can see you when they come in, and you can also see them to identify them when they have sat down: hence they know you are there and you can name them if necessary;
- iii) insist on no talking; if there is talking or misbehaviour pick on someone by name and punish as appropriate but avoid getting into a situation where you are handing out several punishment marks or whatever in public as this can exacerbate the situation;
- iv) try to be firm in voice, sharp if necessary but also calm;
- v) try to convey an impression of comprehensive surveillance.

### Leaving chapel:

much as for going into chapel.

### 2. Break, short:

try to survey terrace area and also the queue for food and drink.

### 3. Lunch:

if starting lunch:

- i) be there first;
- ii) send miscreants to back of queue;
- iii) keep an eye on unsupervised tables to try to ensure an orderly start including pouring water, helping to vegetables sitting down, keeping lids on vegetable dishes;
- iv) before dismissing: "stop talking ad sit still" and pick on first person not complying, by name; place duty patrol leaders and

dismiss tables individually, junior first, allowing each table to pass through the door before dismissing the next.

**4. Upstairs rest:**

- i) have a notebook, in which to write names of offenders, or noisy/late list;
- ii) don't expect settled silence until the children have had time to settle down;
- iii) when time enough to settle has passed, circulate to settle, and then continue to circulate but not too predictably.

**5. Free time:**

establish places to be visited e.g. classrooms (upstairs, downstairs and outside) computer room, gym, cellars, showers, library etc. and outside areas, and circulate, but, again not too predictably; don't let children shout questions or requests for permission at you from a distance: make them come to you.

**6. Supper:**

circulate down one aisle and up the other, checking on the queue each time round; change circuit as appropriate; maintain demonstrative surveillance mode, but try not to look as though you are looking for trouble; when time for silence: "stop talking and sit still;" repeat if necessary and then again pick on any initial non-compliance by name; release as for lunch.

**Assignments:**

again try to be there first, with a notebook and the noisy/late list; settle each room individually, main house first, and then circulate unpredictably; use seniors to look after junior forms where and when possible: try to establish a prefect or particular patrol leader in charge of 5A and another in charge of 5B - responsibility divided between patrol leaders can

be unsatisfactory - punish offenders by detaining after official end of period: isolate particular offenders where possible; when dismissing classes: first ask the children to put the desks and chairs in order and pick up any rubbish off the floor around their desks, and then dismiss individually or in rows: this makes for a more orderly exit and a tidier room.

Some Ideas and Suggestions Put Forward in a  
Full Staff Meeting on May 1st 1991

A. Concerns

1. Silliness amongst senior boys; unpleasant personal remarks; remarks about members of staff in front of other staff;
2. boys being silly to impress girls; hero worship of a wrong type: leading astray: bad leadership amongst children; nastiness;
3. children getting naughty earlier: discipline needs to be seen to be more effective at the top of the school; children need to know the boundaries better; for particular children sanctions run out;
4. a lack of tone and pride and self esteem amongst, particularly, senior boys;
5. vandalism: several incidents unresolved;
6. a lack of consistency as regards how children wait for staff to come to lessons: a lack of a good start to some activities, including lessons, through the lack of time;
7. assignments need better supervision, winding down time not long enough for boys before going to bed;
8. some staff who have difficulties are not seeking advice and help: our advisory/back up skills are not being tapped enough; lower school children have little chance to talk to tutor or such like.

B. Suggestions for restructuring and reorganising

1. Standardise beginning of lessons: five minutes between lessons: Form Time at beginning of day: three lessons each side of Short Break;
2. Lunch: make more formal, family occasion, perhaps attempt to keep patrols together more;
3. house system: more regular house meetings: positive and negative reinforcement might be done more in relation to house system: shaming in house group might be less of a controversial issue;
4. privileges: create more, hence there would be more to be removed;
5. Staff meetings: break into smaller groups more often;
6. children: seek help from outside in dealing with particularly difficult children: important to contact parents earlier: parents should be made more accountable: important to seek more commitment from parents, perhaps offer a system of guidelines for parents - workshop with parents?

C. Staff guidance and technique/support systems for staff

1. Staff folder including key rules, simplified list of rules, guidelines, suggested techniques;
2. monitoring of new staff; institute advice system for staff: develop means of eliciting information about difficulties from those staff who have them;
3. check list for form time;

D. General needs/required modifications

1. need to spot trouble makers earlier; need to identify areas where bad behaviour occurs; need to look where silliness is coming from; why are the bad bad?
2. need for more sanctions in cases where they tend to run out; need for more instant punishments;
3. need for more positive feedback for good behaviour;
4. need for means of canvassing views of ancillary staff;
5. staff need to be more consistently aware of their general responsibility when not actually on duty;
6. need for means of compensating for not having a loud voice, good eyesight and hearing.

E. Ways forward

1. separate group sessions/workshops on:-
  - i) organisation and structure of the day including: morning form time, five minutes between lesson, three lesson each side of Short Break, meals etc. (perhaps this should be a priority because it affects the timetable);
  - ii) concerns: to treat them more fully and hence do them more justice;
  - iii) tone, pride/lack of pride, self esteem;
  - iv) techniques for staff and children;
2. work towards staff guidance/supervision/support scheme, perhaps including folder, workshops and individual contributions from members of staff.

Summary of a Meeting of Seven Members of Staff, Including the Senior Master on Thursday 18th July 1991

1. Review of progress since April 1991

It was generally felt that the discipline during the past term had been slightly better. We had discussed behaviour regularly amongst most staff involved; this seemed to have helped, though we had let the routine slip slightly towards the end of the term; we had never really got to grips with the worst cases.

The main progress was:

- i) that we had been talking about our concerns more regularly; this had helped to keep them further to the forefront of our minds, and some useful thinking had emerged;
- ii) that we have put our concerns about behaviour first at most staff meetings;
- iii) that we have moved away from the effete thinking - prevalent since 1967 in DH's experience - that: the concerns regarding behaviour/discipline were all the fault of either the headmaster or some members of the staff, who either could not cope or did not bother to cope; and that: hence there was little that could be done to improve things;
- iv) having moved away from the thinking in iii) we have shown that we can make progress with the new thinking, and hence that there are things that can be done to make improvements.

It was generally felt we should continue our work towards improving behaviour and discipline.

## 2. Some suggestions

- a) i) Perhaps new staff should have an experienced member of staff as a mentor.
- ii) Generally, staff and senior children should be encouraged more to seek help from staff, senior master or headmaster if they experience difficulties.
- iii) A student teacher must be regarded as a member of staff; the children must not be encouraged to see him or her as a friend; the word friend must not be mentioned in this context.

## 3. List of techniques

We decided to spend most of the meeting revising the list of techniques of April 21st, 1991, with a view to offering them, along with a list for senior children, to be considered in a workshop session involving the whole staff near the beginning of the Autumn Term 1991.

Revised Suggestions for a List of Techniques for  
Discipline August 3rd 1991

Addressing groups

1. Insist on silence before giving instructions and information.

2. Use "stop talking and stand (or sit) still," as opposed to "quiet" or "silence"; do not use "hush" or "shut up".

The use of "I am waiting," and allowing the group to establish its own silence can work.

Always be precise, and be prepared to wait a reasonable time for the group to settle.

3. Then use "listen carefully please." Try to establish some eye contact with the group - just some of it, if it is large -, and try not to look over their heads. Timing is difficult - requiring a sense of balance - and important.

4. If the response to 2. is not good, repeat calmly but firmly.

5. If the response to 4. is not good, pick on someone by name, calmly but firmly and quite sharply, and look at them. If it seems appropriate, punish them or ask to see them afterwards, but naming them would probably be sufficient at this stage; if punishing, try to do so in graded stages.

It is probably better to avoid giving out punishments to several individuals in front of a group because this can load the odds against whatever you want to do next; this clearly depends on the context; momen-

tum can be lost by excessive punishment.

It is important to know the names of children and know where they sit.

6. When silence has been established, try to convey instructions and information clearly and calmly and try to establish eye contact with a spread of individuals in some sort of rotation but not repeating the same cycle all the time; this not only can help to set up an interaction but it can also help maintain a sense of surveillance.

Eye contact is an important social skill which needs a lot of practice.

7. If anyone misbehaves, correct them by name, punish if it seems necessary, and re-establish silence before proceeding.

It is important to establish acceptable behaviour.

Try to use a range of techniques, varying them to keep the children on their toes.

Decide on a gesture for attention: "hands on heads" can work well with young children, and highlights those not paying attention.

8. Recapitulate information and instructions, and invite questions from any who might not understand, before moving to the next stage.

9. Towards the end of a group activity, debrief/assess session and invite questions before dismissing - good time-keeping is important in order to have time to do this; it is also important to invite children to come back and ask questions later.

10. The bell tells the member of staff when the lesson is over, but, if he or she keeps children after the end of a lesson immediately preceding another, then that member of staff is technically in the wrong.

11. Dismiss in small groups or individually; have set places for the children: they may choose initially but then they may be moved by you; children who go to the back usually need watching.

12. Throughout any activity try to resist any feeling of there being a pressure to rush on - it's better to get through a little work thoroughly in the beginning, and thus to set the tone, than to get through a lot chaotically.

13. The school rules say that at the beginning of a lesson, i.e. immediately after the bell, the children should either line up outside the classroom or they should enter and sit down, in each case in silence.

Revised Suggestions for a list of Techniques  
for Discipline Continued August 3rd 1991

More general

1. It is a good principle to try to get to your lesson, game, meal or whatever, before the children, if possible - it is easier to prevent trouble than to stop it.
2. If possible do not allow children much time in a lesson, or their activity, with nothing to do; do not allow them many minutes - 5 to 10 maxima depending on age and apparent ability - just listening.
3. If there is a danger of whatever activity you wish to be carried out being too difficult for some or all the group, make sure you have a contingency plan; but, of course, don't compromise your longer term expectations. Always have plenty of work planned for the children to do.
4. If the need arises to correct a child in front of a group, avoid being drawn into prolonged conflict in front of the group; if you have to speak to a child individually, it's probably better to do it after the session when the others have gone.
5. Remember that you will come in to contact with some children whom you will find hard to like, and some who will irritate you more than others. You will probably find you naturally interact with some children much less than with others, so you need to recognise that some thus miss out and need to be compensated somehow.
6. Generally, avoid giving children options as to what they may do.

7. Avoid giving punishments which can not be fulfilled; if in doubt consult another member of staff.

8. Avoid giving instructions which cannot be fulfilled, e.g. instructions contradictory to, or in conflict with, other instructions already given.

9. Try to be discriminating as regards which misdemeanours you choose to correct; you cannot correct everything, so try to establish priorities: be willing to confront important issues, and be willing to seek the help and advice of another member of staff; remember that ignoring some of the more trivial offences can be a useful skill; once you begin to pursue an issue, however, be sure to follow it through.

10. Generally, avoid sarcasm and humiliating; children don't like these but what you can do depends much on your personal relationship with them; be aware of your powers.

11. Initially, when addressing children, try not to use language and tone which imply expectations of misbehaviour, inattention, disrespect, carelessness etc. If children sense such behaviour is expected they can be inclined to behave as though it is expected.

12. Avoid chancing your arm by requesting silence and attention when it is practically very difficult if not impossible to achieve, e.g. when patrol leaders are legitimately checking their patrols at Line Up.

## Discipline: A Summary of a Meeting on August 7th 1991

### A summary of a meeting of five members of staff including the headmaster and senior master on August 7th 1991

#### 1. Summary of meeting on July 18th 1991

We looked through this summary and deemed it reasonably accurate.

#### 2. i) Information: Lists of techniques

- a) DH offered the revised lists of techniques for staff; it was agreed that these, having been checked by the headmaster and senior master should be offered to the staff in typed form at the beginning of the Autumn Term 1991.
- b) The senior master and DH offered lists of suggestions of techniques for senior children; it was agreed that these should be collated by the senior master and DH and typed ready to be issued to the patrol leaders at the beginning of the Autumn Term 1991.

#### 3. Techniques

Decisions.

- i) The main decisions about the lists of techniques offered have been recorded in 2(i) a) and b) above.
- ii) Other decisions:
  - a) there would be a meeting of the headmaster, staff and patrol leaders and seconds - probably during the rest period after lunch on the first Wednesday of the Autumn term - in order to try to engender greater feelings of teamwork and mutual support amongst all involved;

- b) the headmaster would try to convey to the whole school an idea of a distinction between "sneaking" and reporting by patrol leaders, in order to resist criticism of the patrol leaders by other children;
- c) a workshop would be run for the 5th and 6th formers, after two or three weeks of the Autumn term, to address some of the difficulties encountered by children in positions of responsibility;
- d) another workshop would address some of the feelings which can be engendered in senior children who do not get selected to be patrol leaders;
- e) the principle of discussing children, and particularly behaviour, first at every staff meeting should be maintained; lists of major and minor offenders should be drawn up as appropriate and used as foci for the discussions.

**Suggestions.**

- a) The headmaster and senior master would try to devise a behaviour report card for Autumn 1991.
- b) The idea of a personal action plan for each senior child was suggested

Discipline: Measures and Actions Agreed

Since March 22nd 1991

A summary of measures and actions which we have agreed to take - in an attempt to improve behaviour - since the beginning on Friday March 22nd 1991, of our new initiative on discipline

A. A summary of conclusions of a discussion of the "Proposals for Action", which took place in a full staff meeting on Wednesday April 17th, 1991

Summarised proposals with comments and recorded approval where applicable:-

1. list of offenders: approved with the comment that perhaps we should look at why and how the offenders have acquired their minuses: this with a view to standardising - to some extent - punishments for particular offences; it was suggested that feedback on this might from now on be forthcoming at our weekly staff meetings;
2. list as a focus: approved;
3. all staff concerned with children to attend first part of staff meeting: approved;
4. children to be considered first at staff meetings: approved;
5. staff meetings weekly: approved;
6. list of practical disciplinary techniques for staff: approved, with the comment that it might be another aid to consistency;
7. weekly working suppers: general idea approved;

8. list of techniques for senior children : approved;
9. badge day: approved with the recommendation that the reasons for it must be made clear; (comment, April 1992: has not happened.)
10. tutors to consider as a contingency the exchanging of tutees in special cases where appropriate and with due discussion with the headmaster: approved, with the suggestion that alternative tutoring could be organised on a temporary basis, perhaps even to run concurrently with the usual tutoring;
11. reduce the area for Short Break: I have to confess I made no note about this, but I do not recall our discussing it;
12. tutors to investigate poor work/poor behaviour ethics pressure groups: approved, with the comment that we must use the Tutors' Book more;
13. attempt at cultivating a greater feeling of community; general idea approved.

Also discussed:-

- i) behaviour report card: approved;
- ii) attempts to shame particular offenders: approved; (comment: thankfully not implemented)
- iii) increase the rewards for good credit scores: perhaps reward with time e.g. excuse from a prep: general idea approved;

B. A summary of actions which were approved in a meeting of: five members of staff including the headmaster and senior master, August 7th 1991

i)a) It was agreed that the revised lists of techniques for staff should be offered, having been checked by the headmaster and senior master, to the staff in typed form at the beginning of the Autumn Term 1991

b) It was agreed that the lists of techniques for senior children should be collated by the senior master and DH and typed ready to be issued to the patrol leaders at the beginning of the Autumn Term 1991.

ii)a) There would be a meeting of the headmaster, staff and patrol leaders and seconds - probably during the rest period after lunch on the first Wednesday of the Autumn term - in order to try to engender greater feelings of teamwork and mutual support amongst all involved.

b) The headmaster would try to convey to the whole school an idea of a distinction between "sneaking" and reporting by patrol leaders, in order to resist criticism of the patrol leaders by other children.

c) There would be a workshop session with the 5th and 6th formers, after two or three weeks of the Autumn term, to address some of the difficulties encountered by children in positions of responsibility.

d) There would also be a workshop session addressing some of the feelings which can be engendered in senior children who do not get selected to be patrol leaders.

e) The principle of discussing children, and particularly behaviour, first at every staff meeting should be maintained; lists of major and minor offenders should be drawn up as appropriate and used as foci for the discussions.

C. Ways forward: suggestions which came out of a

workshop session with all the staff on May 1st 1991.

1. Separate group sessions/workshops on:-

- i) organisation and structure of the day including morning form time, five minutes between lessons, three lessons each side of Short Break, meals etc. (perhaps this should be a priority because it affects the timetable); (This took place on 29/5/91.)
- ii) concerns: to treat them more fully and hence do them more justice;
- iii) tone, pride/lack of pride, self esteem;
- iv) techniques for staff and children;

2. work towards staff guidance/supervision/support scheme, perhaps including folder, workshops and individual contributions from members of staff.

Discipline and Behaviour: Progress So Far - A Personal  
View 11th August 1991

Concern

I have been concerned about the question of discipline and behaviour in this school for many years.

In September 1981 I wrote a paper for an extraordinary staff meeting about discipline, which took place at the beginning of the Autumn term 1981. That paper seems largely naive to me now, though the points about frequent emphasis on principles, an authority to which to appeal, clarification in communication, and consensus, I feel are still relevant.

My recent efforts also now seem naive to me, even though, as I suggest in my summary of agreed actions, I do believe they demonstrate evidence of extensive concerns and considerable potential amongst headmasters and staff to deal with those concerns. Nevertheless they seem naive because they omit attention to an obstacle inevitable in any attempt to change standards: that is an inherent circularity resultant from individuals' expectations, which in turn are dependent upon those individuals' perceptions and their beliefs about what is desirable and what is possible. Elsewhere I have suggested we have moved away from effete thinking which was dependent upon circles of blame amongst headmasters and staff; I believe this to be at least partly true, on the basis that these circles have recently not manifested themselves in our discussions; however I believe some circles of blame do still exist.

I suggest we will not make significant progress unless we improve our thinking further. We need to believe much more in the possibility of improvement. The head of English is, in my view, quite right when he

says that if we wanted to show we could improve things, we could quite easily prevent the children from running in the passages; this has been stopped before. The point is not that running in the passages is a major crime - I suspect all would agree with this - but that it is a minor issue which, if let go, contributes to a sense that the rules do not matter.

### Suggestions

I suggest that my summary of measures and actions since March 22nd 1991 accurately indicates that, as a result of efforts from headmasters and all members of staff, there is much potential available for tackling what amount to considerable concerns. However, in my view, little or none of this potential will be fulfilled if: (i) we omit to adhere in a disciplined way to Proposals for action 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, i.e if we omit to discuss and act upon particular concerns as they arise - we have to remember we are trying to control something which is moving - , and ii) we omit to continue to hold regular discussion about our more general concerns.

### Time

If we say there is not time for us to attend to our concerns, then I suggest we really mean that our concerns are not great enough to warrant our granting ourselves the time to attend to them.

### Commitment

I am willing to work as I have so far - indeed harder if efforts are forthcoming from elsewhere - but, in order to do so, I need the stimulus of knowing that more than a few others are equally concerned, and also - more importantly - willing to play an active part in

carrying this work forward.

### Pessimism

My present view is that the general levels of concern and willingness to act are not great enough to generate the impetus needed. Hence I am pessimistic in that I feel that as a group we will not adhere in a disciplined way to carrying out the resolutions we have made; further, I predict that we will not continue to hold regular discussion about our general concerns, and, as a result, our functioning will soon revert.

### Concluding Comment, April 1992

Towards the end of the Autumn term 1991, I mentioned to the senior master that we were not maintaining our agreed routine of having staff meetings weekly - even when the headmaster was not available -, and discussing children - discipline in particular -, first. He agreed, but said he thought it had not been necessary as concerns had not arisen. I suggested we needed to monitor the system regularly and frequently in order that concerns might not arise.

During the spring term of 1992 our agreed routine regarding meetings was observed in all except for a very few weeks when the headmaster was not available. Towards the end of the term the senior master asked me to remind him where we had reached in our discussions of discipline. I gave him a copy of Discipline: measures and actions agreed since March 22nd 1991, and Discipline and behaviour: progress so far - a personal view, 11th August 1991. He has not mentioned this since (beginning of the summer term 1992, April 21st).

As it turned out there have been few concerns raised about discipline during this academic year, so

far. This in my view is partly because we have a generally good group of senior children. A meeting of headmasters, staff, and senior children did occur at the beginning of the Autumn term, and this was generally considered useful, but it would have been helpful if more such meetings - say two per term - had occurred, just to remind everyone concerned that they were all there to support each other.

Most significantly - in my view - there has been no seminary discussion of disciplinary technique arranged during this academic year. Deliberately I have not suggested any in order to see what would happen. I suggest that this is particularly significant along with the related fact that during the 1991 initiative, apart from me only the senior master offered any suggestions in the way of useful hints, publicly; (in the senior master's case, a list of hints for senior children was offered); this was in spite of the fact that several requests were made at full staff meetings for written contributions, and that, amongst thirty or so members of staff, nearly half were over forty - seven over fifty - each with over fifteen years of teaching experience. There seems to be a difficulty in getting people to put how they do things into words, and this is something - as my report on the 1991 initiative illustrates - that I have not begun to resolve.

Arguably I could turn my own argument - that about a system needing regular monitoring and implementation of extraordinary tension to keep it in a changed state - upon my own thinking and acting. That is, if I want new things, which it has already been agreed should happen, to happen, then perhaps the only way they will happen is if I continue to suggest that they should. This seems to illustrate, once again, difficulties in understanding - in this case my own - which can arise

when "agreements" have been reached, and thus some change seems to have happened, but suppositional states remain the same which means that significant change has not happened. Perhaps if I were to attempt to take the discussions further I should try to push them towards probing suppositions about what can and can not be expected of our children, and what changes in the general level of behaving would be considered desirable.

Thus, in the 1991 initiative, as in previous efforts, apparently crucial conflict between my suppositional states and some of those of the headmaster and senior master amongst others became evident, and, ultimately, in my view, obstructive of change. Hence I am inclined to suppose that I have approached the limit of my powers to effect change within the tolerance of the system; I am in a quandary as to whether or not this is the case.

Thoughts recorded in 1989

An early question.  
Extraordinary meeting.  
More emphasis.  
Other changes.  
My theory.  
Not simple to test.  
Idea worth pursuing because of growing parental interest.  
Care before making radical change.  
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(Thoughts recorded in 1989)

### **An Early Question**

The new headmaster of 1983 told the staff, shortly after taking up his appointment, that one of the first questions a parent asked him was about how he was going to improve the academic standards. Soon afterwards he arranged an extraordinary staff meeting to discuss the issue.

### **Extraordinary Meeting**

At that meeting he suggested that we consider first whether we ought to try to raise standards, and, if so, secondly how this could be done. The general feeling seemed to be that standards were in fact not as bad as some people thought, and that there was more of a need to communicate to parents what was now being achieved- i.e. that most children passed their Common Entrance to their chosen school - rather than adopt radical measures to improve standards. Some long serving staff said that the school had had an early history of low academic achievement and that this still affected perceptions of the school even though standards had improved considerably.

### **Previous headmaster's approach**

The previous headmaster had openly committed himself to a broad, non traditional preparatory school education. To a large extent he was opposed to features such as much importance being attached to marks and the reading of form orders in assembly. He saw these as indicators of an emphasis on academic work, and hence as detracting from what he saw as the all important benefits of a broad education. He was used to being

critized for this by parents and staff. His publicly declared views had contributed to the school's reputation.

### More emphasis

The staff felt that if the new headmaster laid more emphasis than his predecessor on academic achievement, standards would improve. At that time the teachers assessed each child's academic effort every week, giving grades ranging from A to E, with C denoting merely satisfactory. The new intention was that the headmaster should make greater reference to the importance of academic achievement and name children with good grades at the weekly Saturday morning assembly in which he summed up the week. He should also refer to, but not name, children who had been awarded D or E grades, suggesting they had let their forms down. These measures were adopted.

### Other adjustments

The new headmaster introduced other adjustments to the academic system. As soon as he had arrived he had established an extra set of Common Entrance Trial Exams. in the November before the proper exam. the following June. (Under the previous headmaster there had been C.E. Trials only in the March immediately preceding the real thing in June.) I do not think he did this in order to raise standards. I think he saw it as a means of getting a better picture earlier about the children's chances in C.E. However, I considered this a good change because it provided a greater urgency for me to prepare children to confront what amounts to a fairly sophisticated exam., two months earlier. However, whatever the intention was, the system has been running for over five years now and there has been no increase noticed in the general standard achieved in

the C. E examination proper. I suspect there could have been an improvement noticed if targets had been brought forward throughout the school, right down to the most junior forms, because this could have passed on down the school some of the tensions felt by those teaching the C.E. candidates. I have not been able to test this idea. It would not be simple to test because there are no existing clearly defined targets throughout the school.

When the new headmaster introduced the November C.E. Trials he also introduced an extra set of school examinations to take place also in November. Previously there had been one set of school exams. a year, (each June). Each form in a particular year group sat the same exam., and the papers were set by the teachers teaching those forms. The same procedure was to be adopted for the extra set of exams., so again the standards were to be governed by the expectations of the teachers, and therefore the arrangement contained the circularity inherent in the June exams. In both cases therefore the standards are teacher referenced instead of criterion referenced.

### My theory

My theory is that to raise academic standards we need to establish Common Entrance related targets throughout the school and try to increase the pace by attempting to achieve targets a bit earlier so there is more time for consolidation in the final year.

### **Not Simple To Test**

I have not been able to test this idea. It would not be simple to test because there is no system of clearly defined academic targets throughout the school, and a lot of work would be required to establish them.

Once established it would probably be quite difficult to gain the agreement of teachers as to what standards might be achieved earlier, so the inherent circularity of standards dependent on teacher expectations could easily be incurred again. However, the idea is the basis of my theory of how we might raise standards in the school. It was the main theme of a paper, to which I shall refer later, I wrote for the development committee on the subject of standards.

Idea Worth Pursuing Because of Growing  
Parental Interest

I suggest the idea is worth pursuing not just because an improvement in academic standards might result. As the chairman of the development committee pointed out in a paper, to which I refer later also, there is evidence that parents of day children take a more active interest in the academic side of a school. We are beginning to notice this in the junior part of the school as the proportion of day children increases. Teachers' stories about confrontation between parents and themselves are a new and growing feature of staff room conversation. In many an instance it has been what the teacher has been doing with a particular class which has been called in to question. Not only the younger and less experienced but also the older and experienced teachers have been involved. In the absence of a clear, overall system of co-ordination they have found considerable difficulty justifying what they do. Parents now seem much more aggressively critical and questioning of teachers' decisions on assessments and form moves than they were previously, and teachers seem to me to be much more vulnerable, than they need be, without the security of an overall system to which to appeal for objective justification of their actions.

### Another concern: standards of those from the pre-prep.

Another concern which an overall system might alleviate is that regarding the standards achieved by the children who come up from the pre-prep. department. A frequent complaint heard from the teachers in the junior part of the main school is that some children are sent up from the pre-prep too early, either in the middle of a term or the middle of a year. The usual reason for moving them, as far as the head of the pre-prep is concerned, is that they are wasting time and should move on. The actual reason is, in most cases, considered to be that they are being required to move to make room for a child who has been newly admitted, mid-term or mid-year, to the pre-prep. The pressure exerted by the head of the pre-prep. is hard to resist because she is the wife of the headmaster of the main school.

### **Overall Standard In the Pre-prep**

Another complaint is that the overall standard achieved by the children in the pre-prep. is not good enough. This makes it very difficult for the main school junior teachers to bring the children up to what is thought to be an adequate standard as regards the existing functioning. The affects of this are only just beginning to manifest themselves in the junior part of the school so it is impossible to be sure of the outcomes at higher levels in the school. However, it does seem that as the result of not only the headmaster's wife's practice of packing the pre-prep. to the seams and moving children up, out of the pre-prep. to make room for more, but also the fact that there is no clear standard required for entry to the main school from the pre-prep., standards are being lowered. Children who enter the school without going through the pre-prep. are assessed before hand, and, if

particularly weak, are rejected and advised that another school would be more suitable.

#### Care before making radical change

Another view which emerged at the new headmaster's extraordinary staff meeting on standards was that great care should be taken before any radical changes were implemented. It was felt that any effective attempt at making a large improvement in academic standards would necessarily entail a considerable change in the character of the school.

The feeling was that the school organisation and hence its functioning and ethos, was not like that of the highly academic preparatory schools which concentrated on preparing their children for the most academic schools at the expense, in some cases, of pursuing a wider curriculum more fully.

This contrast has recently been highlighted by remarks made by our Director of Music who came to us a year ago from one of those highly pressured, strongly academic schools which concentrates on preparing its boys for Eton and schools with similar academic status. He told me how much more opportunity he has now to arrange music practices and rehearsals than he had at his previous school where so much more time was devoted to academic work. This time was allotted to influential members of staff who taught the Common Entrance candidates and who would never, apparently, give it up just before a school concert for an extra rehearsal to be held. He thought the ethos of that school encouraged those teachers to be unnecessarily selfish about their generous quotas of time, and that their concern was not so much that the boys should pass their exams well but that they should pass them immensely well to make them, the teachers, look good. At such a

school there would be no question of at least an hour a day being spent, as is by our children, on organised hobbies.

### **We Should Not Become An Academic Power House**

At the extraordinary meeting it was generally agreed that we did not want to become an academic power house with very restricted extra curricular activities, but that we would like to raise standards to the extent that there would be less anxiety about some of the weaker candidates when C.E. approached. It did not make sense to pressure the children towards immense academic achievement when the schools for which most of them were entered, and with which we had well established links, did not require it. Parents sent their children to us in the knowledge that we provided a broad education and that we sent most of the children on to a few middle of the range schools. We were supplied with enough children for whom this was acceptable, and so the system continued.

### **My view at the time 1983/4**

My view at the time was that we could have raised our standards and become able to include the more academic public schools comfortably in our range, without changing the character of the school. I thought we should try to do this as I felt it would have increased our ability to attract children if it was seen that we achieved a standard sufficient to gain children entry to any public school. This in itself, I thought, would have helped to improve academic standards because it would help us to attract the children of more academically inclined parents, such as members of the professions, who are members of one category of people who, in many cases, seek the more academic public school for their children. They are also a

category who seem prepared to look further from their homes for an attractive school. It seemed that our school had so many attractions, such as a very impressive building and grounds, a wide range of activities, plenty of facilities and a happy atmosphere. It seemed that the school would have been likely to have been patronised by parents interested in the more academic public schools if it showed itself capable of preparing the children for these, without anxiety about passing Common Entrance. It seemed there would be much advantage in attracting the children of such people. This became more of a concern to me in the immediately ensuing years, for two reasons.

First I heard from a local governor that a near neighbour of his had told him that our new headmaster had told her not to send her son to us if she wanted him to go to Eton, because we would not be able to get him in. This I found irritating because we had in fact sent a few boys to Eton, and some to Winchester, including some who gained scholarships, under the previous headmaster, and I saw no reason why we should not do so again.

Secondly, after our new headmaster's first year the number of pupils began to drop. This was partly, we thought, a natural consequence of a change of headmaster and partly because the new headmaster's first academic year coincided with the final year of a particularly large year group, which duly left at the end of it. Hence we suffered a temporary shortage of children which not only made us uneasy, because at the time it was not evident that it would just be temporary, but also resulted in some staff redundancies. I was therefore concerned that we should aim to make ourselves as attractive and hence competitive as possible.

As it turned out the fall in pupil numbers was temporary, and we are now very full, but I still feel we could and should improve standards and create the potential to attract parents interested in the more academic schools.

#### Long standing concern about academic standards

There had been concern about academic standards under the previous headmaster as long as I had been at the school, and, so I was told, as long as that headmaster had been in charge. Rather as over the question of discipline, he would tend to blame the staff if he or they suggested that standards were unsatisfactory, and the staff would blame him. The question would arise typically in staff meetings when some members of staff expressed doubts about a certain child passing into her or his next school. The headmaster would in cases where he thought there ought not to be doubt, say that he thought we really ought to be able to get the particular child to pass the exam. and that something was wrong if we could not. The staff would then point out that there were so many activities and the day was so full that it was very difficult to give a child extra help, where necessary, or to get unsatisfactory work re-done.

Such discussions led to the introduction of a daily period of detention, called extra work, in which children would re-do unsatisfactory work. This led to further discussions as to whether extra work should have priority over every other activity which might be arranged in the half hour or so of break time before lunch, when the extra work occurred; should it, for example, take precedence over: choir practice; music lessons and practices; team practices before matches, and woodwork. All of these, and more, might be specifically timetabled for a particular child, in some cases

as individual lessons with outside part-time teachers. It was agreed on one occasion that, where possible, extra work would be arranged around official activities; on a later occasion it was agreed it should have priority over everything else except in cases where it clashed with an individual music lesson, when it would be done the following day.

My own view was that the latter arrangement was preferable because the academic work had to be the major priority, otherwise the weaker teachers' authority was very much undermined; but, in the instances of clashes with individual music lessons there seemed justification for the extra work to be done the following day, simply because the music timetable was so difficult to dovetail in with all the other activities.

For a while under the first headmaster, however, the extra work period was abandoned altogether. This may not be surprising in the light of the range of possible conflicts with it.

### Concern about maths

The first headmaster would reply to criticisms of his system by criticising individual teachers if he thought their results poor. He was particularly severe on the head of maths, mainly it seemed because the two of them quite clearly disliked each other. He held the head of maths responsible for the standards of maths throughout the school, but he would never involve him directly in the appointment of new maths teachers.

It was true that the standard of maths as measured in terms of Common Entrance percentages, was lower than that of the other two major Common Entrance subjects, English and French - but this had for a long time been

the case and it was generally accepted that the English and French papers were easier. The headmaster used to argue that the previous head of maths used to get better results. This was never clearly shown, but it was countered by the succeeding head of maths pointing out that in the time of his predecessor there were two full time and one part-time coach, and that some children who were considered to be in need of a lot of extra help never attended formal maths classes. This was true. Why the coaches were dispensed with I am not sure; probably they were considered an expensive luxury.

#### **My Opinion Asked**

The previous headmaster asked my opinion of the difficulties of achieving a good standard in maths at Common Entrance. I said that the Common Entrance maths papers were very sophisticated for 13 year olds and that they required a discipline of thought that was difficult to achieve without devoting much time to it, and that within our system there was not really the time available. I said that in more academically inclined schools the children would complete the syllabus a year earlier than our children, thus allowing much more time for consolidation. This had been my own experience as a pupil, and it was also the case with children from other schools whom I had tutored in the holidays. This I said would entail targets being met earlier, right the way through the school. I drew a comparison with Latin on the ground that it required a similar sort of discipline of mind and that our Latin results were really no better than the maths. I pointed out that in the more academic schools Latin would be started a year earlier than in our school. He agreed with what I said about the Latin, but said that it did not concern him much because it was no longer either a major or indeed an obligatory subject for

entry to the sort of schools to which we sent children. In the same discussion I suggested that the English marks would suffer in the same way as the maths if the English were still examined in the rigorous way it had been when I was a pupil. Then there was much more emphasis on intellectual discipline in terms of grammar, comprehension, precis writing and logical argument whereas now the same precision was not required. He agreed with this - he was himself an English graduate and had taught English at Common Entrance level at more than one school, whereas he had taught maths only to juniors for a short while - and said only a few days previously he had been unpleasantly surprised by the top form. He had asked them, when the regular English teacher was away, to discuss a subject in the form of an essay, and he had been amazed by their lack of ability to set out coherent arguments.

During the discussion about maths he seemed to accept my points but he did not suggest that we should look further in to my idea about covering the syllabus earlier. He maintained that the two women who taught the three most junior forms did a thorough job. I agreed that they did, but that, with the great respect which I genuinely had for them, they did a limited job and that they could and should be asked to cover more ground. It seemed obvious to me that there was a case for some intra departmental discussion and reorganisation of what was taught and when, but I did not like to suggest it. I was afraid that what I suggested would be passed on to the head of maths who would assume I had been trying to make trouble behind his back.

I got on well with the head of maths though he was not an easy-going person and he needed handling carefully, particularly over the question of the standard of maths about which he was understandably sensitive.

### The headmaster and heads of departments generally

The previous headmaster did not seem to see the heads of his departments as needing to organise the other teachers within their departments. None of the other subject heads did much at all about the organisation of what and how things were taught, apart, that is, from providing a syllabus. The headmaster seemed to think that if a teacher agreed to teach a subject at a certain level, irrespective of whether he or she had taught in a preparatory school before or not, - and in this case our head of maths had not-then he or she must automatically know what to do. As it happened, the headmaster was generally very well served by some dedicated teachers who on the whole were very experienced. However, his method meant that he was not well informed as regards what was being taught, when, and to what standard, because he left all the standard setting to the particular individual teachers.

Clearly the expectations of the individual teachers are the main forces which determine what the children attempt to achieve, but I suggest however that the teachers' expectations need to be governed by a meta-system to the system which consists of them and their interaction with the children. The function of this meta-system, a system about a system, would be to impose a tension on each teacher to set specific targets for the children.

### A lack of an informing system

The interacting, or lack of it, between the headmaster and his heads of department constituted a potential concern for those who perceived it. The fact that the headmaster and head of maths did not get on well with each other, and hence did not communicate very successfully, was an unfortunate extra concern. If I

had been headmaster I would have felt a lack of a system for informing me of what was happening at various levels in each department, and a lack of a system of control for each level. Common Entrance provided a final control, but the rest of the year groups were examined with school exams., the standards of which were set by the individual teachers teaching those groups. There was not a system of termly exams. or tests.

### Weekly grades

Under the previous headmaster the systems of weekly grades for academic effort worked well. Children were graded from A to E inclusive, with C as merely satisfactory. These grades were looked at weekly, at the beginning of staff meetings, and members of staff were asked to comment on children who received poor grades. This seemed a good way for the headmaster to inform himself of the efforts children were making, and where these were deemed inadequate, of finding out what the teachers were doing about it and how successful they thought they were being. A spin off from this routine was that it brought children in to focus at the beginning of each staff meeting, and other child centred issues such as health, behaviour and welfare were also mentioned.

Unfortunately this procedure ceased. I never knew why, but I assumed that it was felt there were too many matters to be discussed at staff meetings, and that time was short. I have recently suggested that it be reinstated, for reasons I shall try to make clear later.

### Extra preps.

After two years, the new headmaster of 1983 introduced an extra set of daily preps. as another measure

to improve standards. This has been running for four complete years with no obvious improvement in standards. This is not surprising considering that this introduction imposes no extra tension on teachers and pupils to achieve higher standards.

### I.S.J.C Inspection

In November 1985 three inspectors appointed by the Independent Schools Joint Council paid the school a review visit which lasted two days.

### Conclusion

The conclusion of their generally very favourable report was as follows: "Somewhere inside the overwhelmingly favourable sets of impressions gained by the team on what was a short visit, there lurks a notion that a greater attention to precision, detail, and a concerted effort by all staff to the undeniably difficult matter of "standards" could only improve the quality of life in a most attractive and immensely well-equipped school. There is some tension, somewhere, between what the school was established to be and the more urgent competitive realities of the present time. The headmaster is well equipped to face this matter sensitively yet purposefully. The aim should be to capitalise in every way on the remarkable variety of skills and activity available to every pupil while reviewing, and in some cases reconstructing all schemes of work, so that they become explicit in all subjects about the knowledge, skills, concepts, and attitudes to be acquired by pupils and the variety of methods the staff intend to use to achieve these purposes.

### My view of this conclusion

My view of this conclusion is that it could be interpreted as supporting my theory that if some attention were paid to, and some changes were made in, the organisation of the academic system, the functioning could be considerably improved. On the other hand it could be viewed as a rather generalised conclusion, formed after a fairly cursory review visit of a mere two days.

When I referred to the report in a development meeting as a means of supporting my argument in favour of trying to do something to improve academic standards, the assistant headmaster discounted the I.S.J.C report's conclusion on the ground that it is very difficult to form an impression of a school in a mere two days. There is, no doubt, some truth in this, and it might well be argued that many of the suggestions made, such as that there should be greater attention paid to precision and detail could well be made about many schools.

### **Too Great A Ring Of Truth**

However, I sensed too great a ring of truth in the conclusion of the report, and in some of its earlier recommendations to which I shall refer later, for all to be dismissed entirely. For instance, its suggestion of a need for a concerted effort by all staff to the undeniably difficult matter of "standards" could be interpreted as supporting my idea of a need for the organisation of intra departmental co-operation and the drawing up of clear syllabuses and schemes of work, and the instituting of a monitoring system in the form of regular tests.

## If I had been headmaster

If I had been headmaster I would have tried to implement intra departmental co-operation to establish what topics should be taught when and to what standard, with the overall aim of finishing the Common Entrance syllabus by the end of the fourth, the penultimate year. This I know is achievable as far as maths and English are concerned. I would have had to have found out more from the other subject departments through discussion, but whatever their findings I would have wanted to have known in outline what was being taught when, and what was thought to be being achieved.

I am well aware that I could not have had direct access to what was happening, or known most of what was happening. However I should have liked to have had knowledge equivalent to that which I gained from the Common Entrance results, and Common Entrance trial results of the fifth and final year group, from all the other year groups.

## Director of studies

I should have considered asking a member of staff to become director of studies and to be responsible for co-ordinating the informing and controlling systems. The assistant headmaster was nominally director of studies but as far as I could see he concerned himself only with receiving and handing out information concerning courses and conferences, and organising the timetables. Recently - the same man still occupies the position - he has been passing on information about the National Curriculum but he has not tried to facilitate inter and intra departmental co-operation over it. As far as the maths is concerned, members of the department have been handed official information to read, but there has been no departmental discussion of it; in

fact we have not had a maths department meeting for over two years.

Going back to the time of the previous headmaster, it seemed to me then that his assistant headmaster, who still holds this position and who is still nominally director or studies, was not a suitable person to be required to deal with people in a capacity in which in many cases there would be situations with potential for conflict over difficult issues. It was the same man whom I indirectly relieved of the control of discipline in the school under the succeeding headmaster, by suggesting the post of senior master.

The assistant headmaster was clerically very efficient, but found it very hard to confront adults and children over difficult issues. He was very much part of the school establishment: evangelical, Oxford and public school educated, with a puritanical air about him, all of which made a significant contrast with some of the senior teachers, many of whom came from different backgrounds. Hence, for the post of director of studies I would have looked for another senior member of staff with natural authority amongst the staff, and with the ability to enlist the staff's co-operation in the institution and co-ordination of a system for controlling and monitoring the academic work in the school. There was such a person on the staff at the time.

#### Some Tension Somewhere.

The I.S.J.C report's suggestion that there is some tension, somewhere, between what the school was established to be, and the more urgent competitive realities of the present time, conforms with my perception of the school. However, there is a suggestion here that the school's character might have to change radically in

order to compete in terms of the more urgent competitive reality of the present time. I argue that it would not and that my proposals would simply quicken the pace of work and inspire urgency further down the school than the Common Entrance year forms.

My point is that those who teach the Common Entrance forms have an urgency imposed upon them by the existence of the exam, but that they do not pass on this urgency to those teaching the forms below them.

My view is that there is of course a functioning here, and there is necessarily an actual organisation which has evolved almost entirely without any official organisation being imposed upon it.

My view of this has been strengthened recently because there have been several changes of teachers in the junior part of the school, partly as the result of an unfortunate succession of illnesses, and so I have come in to contact with many new teachers, some young and in their first jobs, and some older and more experienced. All, experienced and inexperienced, without exception, have said that they have found the school a very difficult one in which to start, because there is no clear organisation of what should be done and when. This was of particular concern in the cases of some temporary teachers who covered for those who became ill.

#### A paragraph on the staff

In a paragraph about the staff, the report says that it may be that the professional education of the staff, should be more systematised. "Some schemes of work - not all - were minimal in content and did not display a proper understanding of the most important educational developments for the age-range." I suggest

that if intra departmental co-operation were organised and minds concentrated on a scheme for the department as opposed to individuals' schemes, which were what were submitted to the inspectors, then this would be a significant first step as regards a contribution to the professional education of the staff. Appropriate courses for teachers could also be considered departmentally, as opposed to entirely individually, as happens.

#### A paragraph on organisation

In another paragraph on organisation, the report accurately states that there is a weekly - they are now fortnightly - assessment of each pupil's progress in the form of the work grades A, B, C, D, and E, which I described earlier, and these are discussed with the children by their tutors individually, each child having his or her own tutor who is in loco parentis, and the headmaster talks to the whole school about these matters weekly. The report declares that it would be difficult to devise a more watchful care of pupils' academic and personal welfare, and with all this, and small class size, it should be feasible to increase the pace of work in that it is here that most parental opinion will form. Nevertheless the report went on, it needed to be stated clearly that the school had continuously got pupils to the secondary schools of their choice. This is all true, but, as regards the last point, it must be remembered that the school advises parents as to secondary schools for their children, and that this advice is necessarily governed by the child's standard which is, in most cases, governed by the standards in the school.

### Stated purpose of the headmaster to sharpen up

At the end of the paragraph on the staff it is mentioned that it is a stated purpose of the head to sharpen up the academic achievements and standards of the school, and that as a result of this it may be that the nature and work of the 6th form should be rethought - though there was clearly room for discussion, indeed argument, about the arrangements to be made for the two 5th forms and the 6th forms. The implication here seems to be that if it is intended that standards be raised, then the place to start reorganising is at the top of the school. I interpret this as supporting my proposal that those teaching at the top of the school should do more towards imposing standards for those below; that if they established that in most cases the Common Entrance syllabus should be finished at the end of the 4th year then arrangements could be made for a consolidatory 5th year. An attempt to finish the syllabus by the end of the fourth year would also be a help to scholarship candidates who would have completed more of the Common Entrance work by the time they passed to the scholarship form, either at the beginning of, or during, the 4th year. Now that we have a flourishing pre-prep. department, most children start in the school either at the age of three, in the pre-prep. department, or at the age of six or seven in the junior form. Hence there is plenty of time available to allow for a quickening of the pace.

### The consequences of the report

The question arises as to what were the consequences of this report. When it arrived the headmaster said he found it complimentary to the school. He left a copy in the staff room so all staff could read it.

### **The report mentioned at a development committee meeting**

Apart from this, the report remained unmentioned publicly until I referred to it in a development committee meeting in December 1987. I was arguing a case in favour of considering spending money on enhancing our academic performance. This was in opposition to a case being argued by the headmaster and assistant headmaster in favour of building a sports hall.

The assistant headmaster argued that it would be wrong to spend money on the academic side of the school just then, because the curriculum was in a state of flux as the result of there being pending changes related to the imposition of the National Curriculum and GCSE; it would probably not be necessary to attend to standards he thought, because Common Entrance was probably going to become easier and include more project work which would suit our ethos better. I responded by saying that Common Entrance was bound to remain competitive because the places in the public schools are inevitably limited, and, further, that the more academic public schools and the middle of the range public schools to the latter of which we sent most of our children, would probably try to preserve much of their traditional academic side, not only to keep themselves exclusive, but also because of the inherent conservatism of any system. I agreed, however, that he had a point, but I maintained we ought to look at our academic system, though I conceded that there was probably, initially anyway, more of a need for organisation rather than the spending of much money on equipment.

As I describe elsewhere, I became short tempered towards the end of the meeting. This was because I was irritated by the headmaster and assistant headmaster who were trying to push through their scheme for a sports hall. The headmaster accused me of being

destructive. I resented that, so, without being asked to do so, I started to work at some outline schemes for a sports hall. I went to see one which had been recently constructed, and I invited firms who were prepared to quote without charge to draw up outline plans and costing. I then wrote a paper on the information I gained along with my suggestions for attending to the academic system for the next development meeting. In the paper I quoted the same extracts from the I.S.J.C report which I have quoted above.

### The chairman's paper

The chairman of the development committee was a governor and retired public school headmaster. At the meeting which became acrimonious he had mediated between the headmaster and me in an avuncular way.

For the following meeting he wrote a paper which, to my surprise, was headed with a quotation from the I.S.J.C report. This quotation was the declaration, which I quoted previously, that there was some tension, somewhere, between what the school was established to be and the more urgent competitive realities of the present time. The chairman's paper itself aimed to indicate possible courses of development. It suggested three possibilities, and it invited the governing body to decide priorities as between:

Main Building reorganisation  
Sports Hall/ Swimming pool  
Academic advance - Science, Technology  
and computers

The priorities once chosen were to form the basis of a five year development plan.

The paper made a strong argument for reconsidering

academic standards, and made further references to the I.S.J.C report. It referred, In the light of the increase in the number of day children, to evidence that parents of day children take a more active interest than the parents of boarders in the academic side of the school. They had chosen the school for its academic quality rather than its boarding facility.

A further paragraph pointed out that various parts of the discussion paper, starting with the I.S.J.C quotation which introduced it, had hinted that we should not forget the need for higher academic standards and expectations. If the school's academic commitment were questioned, all the sporting and extra-curricular activities in the world would fail to keep it full.

These remarks were made in support of the possibility of having an extra science teacher and building a Science, Technology and C.D.T complex. At the beginning of the meeting at which these papers were tabled, the chairman asked the headmaster for his view, in the light of his, the chairman's and my paper on what, if anything, should be done in terms of development related to academic standards. The headmaster said we should consider employing an extra science teacher so that science could be taught by a specialist to the lower half of the school but that another laboratory could be provided, temporarily at least, in the existing buildings. Academic standards generally, he said, ought to be sharpened up through target setting throughout the school. The main priorities as far as building development was concerned, he considered, were the Sports hall/ Swimming pool and then the reorganisation of the main building. These two projects occupied the rest of that meeting and several following meetings until the sports hall project was abandoned in the face of increasing pressure, in the form of a lack

of classrooms and girls dormitories, to reorganise the main building. A new science teacher was appointed and a room converted to a laboratory, but apart from this no further mention has been made about academic standards through target setting.

### **Why was nothing done?**

The question arises as to why nothing further was done, or even mentioned, regarding academic standards.

In terms of the notion of organisation and functioning, the functioning of the system was in my view inefficient because there was really no, or at any rate very little, organisation. As I saw it, the system nowhere nearly approached fulfilling its potential. But, it had to be said, it worked. Almost all the children achieved places at schools towards which we steered them. The school was full and seemed likely to remain so, so there was no pressing need to change. Added to this, academic standards had been discussed many times, and the new headmaster had instituted new measures in an attempt to improve them. These measures included the following.

1. An extra set of exams. for the whole school, in December, whereas previously there had been just one set which had taken place in June.
2. An extra set of Common Entrance Trial exams., for the leaving year group, in December, whereas previously there had been just one set which had taken place in March.
3. An increase in the number of daily preps. from one to two.
4. Extra emphasis laid on academic work grades by the headmaster in school assemblies.

## Work Grades

The system of work grades had also come in for revision after the new headmaster had been in office for three years.

A new French teacher, who arrived two years after the headmaster, complained that our grading system which consisted of grades merely for effort, was misleading to some of the parents. This was because it was possible for a child of low ability to get consistently good grades but then be told that she or he was not up to the standard of the school to which the parents wished her or him to go. It was then decided in a staff meeting to change the grading system. The letters A, B, C, D, E for effort were to be retained but numbers from 1 to 5 were to be added to them to indicate attainment levels. These grades were to be given fortnightly instead of weekly because it was considered too complicated a system to be operated weekly. I regard it as preferable to have grades weekly - even if only for effort weekly - as opposed to fortnightly, because this provides more frequent informing of the headmasters and tutors.

### More general point

The point I wish to make here is a more general one. It is that all the new measures I have mentioned comprised modifications to the existing system, instead of comprising a meta system. By this I mean that the changes in organisation did not entail changes in standards of expectation; they merely entailed extra ways of imposing the effects of the same expectations. I suggest that to have raised standards actually, which would have entailed a change in functioning, it would have been necessary to have got outside the existing system of expectations, which were dependent on the in-

dividual teachers' standards, and imposed a new standard of expectation upon the individual teachers. Hence an effective change in functioning here requires a change in organisation which entails a modification in the feedback loop linking achieved standard and teacher expectation. The teacher expectation can, in my view, only be raised by raising the expectations on the teacher, and imposing a consistent tension to maintain the raised expectation.

### A Simplification

My suggestion that expectations could be raised by attempting to achieve targets earlier is admittedly a gross simplification because in order to do this a great deal of departmental discussion would be required. From the point of view of a maths teacher I can give an example of a consideration which might have to be made .

#### **An example of a consideration: adding and subtracting fractions**

I have taught mathematics to a 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th year set for over ten years. When I started I taught topics in the order in which they had been taught before which was partly prescribed by the series of text books then currently in use. After two years, I decided an excessive amount of time had to be spent in the 2nd and 3rd years trying to get the children to understand how to add and subtract vulgar fractions and mixed numbers using common denominators. This topic was traditionally introduced before the multiplication of vulgar fractions and mixed numbers which seemed a very much more readily grasped procedure. So much time seemed to be wasted on fairly complicated examples of addition and subtraction of fractions, with few of the children gaining any long term mastery of the tech-

niques, that I suggested we postponed the work. This was readily agreed by the other teachers and we have found that the work in question can be grasped much more quickly at a later age without upsetting the whole syllabus. Consequently, as there are plenty of topics in the syllabus which can be grasped at an early age more readily than the addition and subtraction of vulgar fractions, these can be left until later.

### **Much Thought Needed**

My point here is that if it is proposed to try to reach targets earlier, a lot of thought has to go into what should be taught, when. The aim would be to try to cover a greater number of topics earlier with careful attention paid to trying not to cover particular topics at stages before the children can cope with them satisfactorily. This would have to be the subject of departmental discussion and co-operation. This would probably take up a lot of time initially.

### **Better organisation in which to function**

I offer my theory that targets could be reached earlier because I know that this happens in other comparable schools. If a system of more clearly defined syllabuses, schemes of work and testing procedures was drawn up, I think that not only could it become part of a means of raising standards, but also it could provide a framework in which the younger, less experienced and poorer teachers could function more effectively. We will nearly always have teachers from some or all of these categories, and so, in my view, we should aim to devise a system which facilitates their functioning better. At present many of our teachers complain of a lack of direction.

## Results of my action were minimal

### **Target Setting**

The result of the remarks I made in the development committee meeting and the paper I wrote was minimal. In the following development committee meeting the headmaster said that we would try to improve standards through target setting.

At a later staff meeting he asked the heads of departments to call departmental meetings to discuss the question of raising standards and then to report back at the next meeting. The meetings occurred and at the next full staff meeting the heads of departments each made some very brief comments about the discussions they had had and the reorganisation, if any, they intended. There was no hint of trying to attain targets earlier, or the institution of criterion referenced testing. Also there was no mention of the implementation any of the I.S.J.C reports proposals such as: "the reviewing, and in some cases reconstructing of all schemes of work, so that they became explicit in all subjects about the knowledge, skills, concepts and attitudes to be required by pupils and the variety of methods the staff intended to use to achieve these purposes." There was no follow up to this, and, as far as the maths department was concerned at any rate, the organisation and functioning remained largely the same.

### **Why was little done?**

If I ask why this was the case I might perhaps ask myself why I did not make more of my own ideas both in general and departmental discussion, or perhaps in my own teaching as I taught sets in four of the five year groups in the school. The answer is that my view was

that there was such a lot of work to be done, even in my own teaching, to establish a new organisation that I was reluctant to advise others to attempt a course of action, when I had not attempted something similar myself. Hence I resolved to re-organise my own teaching and to attempt then, if successful, to influence the rest of the department, and then perhaps the other departments. It is the issue I intend to tackle next, but very much at a local, personal level to begin with.

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**Heart Attack**

At the beginning of the Autumn Term 1986 the headmaster had a heart attack. He had just appointed the senior master, which proved to be of particular advantage at the time, as the headmaster was off work for the whole term.

**Headmaster Attends Development Meeting**

Though officially off work, the headmaster attended the development committee meeting in the Autumn Term, mainly, I suspect, to hasten the provision of extra accommodation required by the pre-prep. department, which was run by his wife.

**Controversial Issue**

The question of the provision of new accommodation for the pre-prep. department gave rise to a controversial issue amongst the staff on one side and the headmaster and assistant headmaster and their respective wives, and many of the governors on the other.

**A Need Existed**

No one seemed to doubt that the department needed extra space. It was in its second year. It had started in September 1985 with an intake of three year olds, with enough room to accommodate them the next year as four year olds along with the next intake of three year olds. Accommodation for five year olds did not exist.

### Three Options Emerged: A, B and C

plan A: a brand new building on site A which was and still is where the school stables stand;

plan B: a brand new building on site B, a site some two hundred metres from the main school, just off one of the main drives;

plan C: an expansion of the existing pre-prep. department which was accommodated in part of the main school building. This would have involved taking over more rooms from the main school and some consequent reshuffling within the main school.

### My View At The Time

My view at the time was that we should adopt plan C for the following reasons.

- i) It would be cheaper.
- ii) It would avoid spending a large sum on a new development which had not had time to show that its benefits to the school justified greater expense.
- iii) a) As the proportion of day children was increasing, and the effect of the pre-prep. would be to increase this further, it seemed a bad idea to spend money creating more space in a new building while existing space in the boarding area of the school was being emptied.

- b) If we were serious about wanting to resist the increase of the proportion of day children, then here was the opportunity for us, the headmaster and his wife included, to demonstrate that intention by limiting the size of the pre-prep; this I thought was the most important part of the argument.
- c) It had been suggested that a school ceased to be seen by many parents as a boarding school if the proportion of day children in that school increased beyond a certain limit, the result being that the boarding number decreased even further.
- iv) Building a new pre-prep. would, I suspected, have allowed for an increase in the number in each year group of the pre-prep. I knew that the headmaster's wife, who was a law unto herself virtually, intended to increase the number. In fact she did exactly this in the following year, before the new building was built, allowing the pre-prep. to grow to 45, exceeding the governor's stipulation that it should be only 30. Now that the pre-prep. is in its new building it has grown to over 50.
- v) I thought there were other expenses looming. I mentioned these under the heading of possible large expenses, in the paper which follows.
- vi) I felt we needed to bring our outstanding maintenance up to date before we added more buildings to be maintained.

### **A Cause of Division**

The siting of the new pre-prep. became a cause of division between, on one side, the headmaster and assistant headmaster and their wives and on the other side most of the staff.

### **Fear**

The fear that too large a pre-prep. would eventually lead to the school becoming solely a day school was strong. It was felt that the character of the school would be changed to a great extent - for the worse, in the opinion of the staff - possibly leading to its demise.

### **Emotive disagreement**

The division became emotive. As staff representative I was at the centre of the dispute, and under much pressure from some staff to oppose plans A and B, and to support plan C, which happened to concur with my personal view.

### **Extraordinary staff meeting**

An extraordinary staff meeting was called to discuss this issue on 25th February 1987. For this meeting I wrote the following paper.

There is evidence of an accelerating increase in our number of day children

		B	D	Income equivalent in boarders
TREND	1982	156	33	178
	1983	164	32	186
	1984	150	39	176
	1985	147	39	173
	1986	142	48	174
	1987	137	71	184
	(Guess) (or soon after)	1988	100	100+
Projected List	1990?			If there is a projected list we should consider its implications
CONSENSUS				There seems to be a consensus in favour of regaining and retaining a traditional boarding majority if possible.
SELF INDUCED CHANGE				The recent dramatic increase in day children is largely an effect of the first in- take from the pre-prep. It is therefore self induced.
NATIONAL TREND				There is apparently a national trend toward day education and weekly boarding but there is no evidence that the boarding market is going to disappear.
OUR ACTION				IF WE INTEND TO TAKE ACTION TO REVERSE OUR TREND AWAY FROM BOARDING THEN WE MUST DEMONSTRATE WE CAN DO THIS EFFECTIVELY BEFORE WE SPEND MONEY ON CREATING MORE SPACE. IF THE TREND CONTINUES WE SHALL NOT NEED MORE SPACE.

MAINTEN- We are not keeping up with the maintenance  
ANCE AND of the space we have got, and if we go  
UNUSED beyond an 'elastic limit' as regards day  
SPACE numbers we could be saddled with unused  
space such as senior boys' dormitories,  
junior boys' accommodation and girls'  
accommodation.

ENOUGH WE HAVE ENOUGH SPACE TO ACCOMMODATE TWO  
SPACE MORE FORM ROOMS AND AN EXTRA PRE-PREP CLASS

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO DISCUSS THIS  
WITHOUT MORE KNOWLEDGE OF THE FINANCES AND  
FINANCE PROJECTED TRENDS BUT without the immediate  
GENERAL building of a new pre-prep. the suggestions  
IMPROVEMENT above should afford enough surplus to  
MAINTENANCE improve resources generally (where needed)  
and catch up on much needed and over-due  
maintenance.

LONGER In the longer term, when adequate controls  
TERM have been successfully implemented and  
established in the pre-prep, THE INDEPE-  
NDENT SITING OF A NEW PRE-PREP PROBABLY  
NEW PRE- WOULD BE DESIRABLE, but NOT on the site of  
PREP the existing stables. Then, it might be  
desirable to remove the outside temporary  
classrooms and re-plan that area.

#### Some recent estimates

ESTIMATES	i) Building new pre-prep.
	November '86 £60,000
	February '87 £90,000 - £150,000
	ii) Moving stables
	February '87 £12,500 (money which could be much better spent in other

ways)

### Summary

Big money should not be spent creating more unnecessary space, at great cost to the school as a whole, until we have rationalised and demonstrated we can exercise necessary control over our boarding and day numbers and entry from the pre-prep particularly. If money is available we should consider schemes of general benefit before putting up more major buildings,

D.H

## Extraordinary Staff Meeting

Below, I include part of my record of the extraordinary staff meeting and a letter I subsequently wrote to the chairman of the governors on the night before the governors' meeting at which the issue was to be decided.

### Extraordinary staff meeting, 4.30p.m.

February 25th 1987

The headmaster opened the meeting by saying that there were three sites to consider:

- i) the architect's favoured site, site A,
- ii) the Water Tower site, site B, and
- iii) the Main House site, site C.

He listed the advantages and disadvantages of each site, as he saw them, as follows.

	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Site A		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. It has good access.</li><li>2. It is near the main school so the facilities in the main school would be easily accessible.</li><li>3. Choosing Site A would release two class rooms in the main school.</li><li>4. We have a plan already passed for a purpose built pre-prep. on site A.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. It is near staff accomm. and so noise from it could constitute a nuisance.</li><li>2. It is near the kitchens and so delivery lorries could be a hazard.</li><li>3. Building on site A would entail moving the stables.</li></ul>

5. It is near the headmaster's house.

#### Site B

1. It has good access.
2. It is near the main entrance to the school.
3. It has a ready-made play area.
1. It is a long way from the main school
2. There is a possibility of building a sports hall on site B in the future so putting a pre-prep. there might limit development.
3. Because site B is a long way from the headmaster's house, having a pre-prep. on site B would be more difficult for the headmaster's wife (who was to run the pre-prep.).

#### Site C

1. Using site C would encourage the development of the eastern end of the main house.
2. Using site C would mean no addition to maintenance.
1. There would not be enough room on site C to build an assembly hall for the pre-prep.
2. Using site C would mean that the main school would lose its cinema/television room.
3. Using site C would create a hotchpotch of rooms and buildings.
4. The parents might see our using site C as a temporary measure.

## DH's Paper

The headmaster then said that DH had written a paper in favour of site C, but that he, the headmaster, had only just received a copy, and not everyone else had seen one.

### Some of the discussion which followed

The senior master's wife felt we should not be pressurised just because we had plans.

The headmaster said he did not want people to feel the decision was being bludgeoned through.

The director of music felt it was important not to be hasty and important to take time to make the right decision.

The headmaster said there were no costs available for sites B and C.

The caterer asked how much site A would cost.

The headmaster said there was a rough figure of £90,000 for pre-prep. buildings but we would like to cut out much of the cost. £90,000 does not include moving the stables.

The caterer asked if we needed a pre-prep. which would hold forty children.

The headmaster said that the pre-prep. needed better buildings and that it was under pressure in that it lacked space.

The senior master asked why we were admitting more children per year into the pre-prep.

The headmaster said that we needed three classes: one for four year olds, one for five year olds, and another for six year olds.

The senior master asked why the pre-prep was increasing its total of children to forty.

The headmaster's wife said that the pre-prep. aimed to make a profit and that it could do that with three classes with twelve to fifteen children in each.

The senior master said that it was important to look at the number of children in the pre-prep. in the context of the whole school; there was a danger in the increase in the number of day children.

The headmaster's wife said that at least two thirds of the founding group of children in the pre-prep. had stated the intention of boarding.

The headmaster said that we had moved into the pre-prep. world and that we must not go over points already made in staff meetings. He, the headmaster, had come to run a boarding school; it was up to all of us to encourage the children to become boarders.

The history master said that two years previously we had had two plans: Plan 1 for a building on the present site C, costing £150,000, and plan 2 using existing facilities on site C. So, he asked, why did we chose plan 2 last time.

The headmaster replied that previously there had not been enough money available and the main school now needed to get back the outside classrooms which had been used to accommodate the new pre-prep. initially.

The director of music said that he felt it would surely be better to build in what we have got, and tidy up smelly lavatories, and build up the east wing to provide new music rooms, and improve existing buildings; the maintenance would be simpler.

The housemaster said we ought to go for plan C because it would be much less expensive.

The headmaster then asked the two members of the pre-prep., staff if they had any particular thoughts.

One of the pre-prep. teachers said that the pre-prep's hall area was very cramped, and that the pre-prep. staff would like the pre-prep. to be more independent from the main school.

The headmaster pointed out that the pre-prep. did,

nevertheless, like to be close to the main school so the main school's facilities could be used.

The pre-prep. teacher said that more cloak room space was also needed.

The headmaster agreed and said that it would be difficult under plan C also to include an indoor play area, a third classroom and a hall.

The director of music said that the extra facilities would have to be built on, or in, existing space. It would save a great deal of money.

The assistant headmaster said that the great thing would be that once the pre-prep. was moved we could forget about it. The school would be running with 210-220, so all the space we have would be needed. Once the pre-prep. was out of the way we would have carte blanche to develop how we liked, A new pre-prep. would provide an extra gym, after 3.30p.m.

The housemaster said there would be space to be used on site C after 3.30p.m.

The art master asked if it was envisaged that a new pre-prep. building, were one to be built, might have

to be extended at a later date.

The headmaster's wife said that three forms of fifteen children each would be the limit.

The music master said that we could benefit everyone immediately by adopting plan C, and that this would be a good compromise.

The senior master's wife said that to spend more than £90,000 just on a new pre-prep. would be to get priorities out of proportion; we needed to do something for the whole school. If the pre-prep. was cramped, why, she asked, had it grown so big; the projected size two years ago was twenty five - our money came from boarding fees.

The headmaster said that we were hoping that the children would board.

One of the housemasters said there was no assurance that any of the day children would board.

The headmaster's wife said that there was no legal contract.

The housemaster said that everyone was worried that the pre-prep. children were not going to board.

The headmaster said that he looked at it more positively. He had to trust that three or five years after a child started in the pre-prep. it would board in the main school. He thought we had to be more flexible.

The senior master said that if the children came through from the pre-prep. as day pupils then they might take an eleven plus exam. and leave early; they might take up places that could have been taken up by boarders.

The headmaster said that again we were straying away from the point.

The head of maths said that we did not make a lot of money out of day children.

The assistant headmaster said that we could charge what we liked.

The headmaster said that we were all keen to keep up the numbers of boarders, but there was a difference of opinion over what might happen as regards boarders.

The head of maths said that if there were no children at the school over the weekends then it was not a boarding school.

A pre-prep. teacher said that the headmaster's wife did stress the advantages of boarding, to the pre-prep. parents, and that the fears about our becoming a day school were unfounded.

The senior master's wife said that two years previously there had been thirty day children in the whole school but that in the coming year there would be seventy day children. If the increase were to go

on, she continued, then we could become predominantly a day school.

The headmaster concluded the meeting by saying that it was not too late to change course. At the development committee meeting the staff members had expressed concern and the committee had said that the staff should discuss the matter. However, he continued, it would be fair to say that the governors would want to go ahead unless they felt that other recommendations were so strong that they ought to be looked at in detail. There was, he felt, a body of people who felt we ought to look in to the main house site, site C, and there was not large support for the other two sites.

I then said that I had said nothing until then, because people would know from my paper that I favoured site C, but that I would like to say that I thought that site C could easily have been operational by the following September at low cost.

The head of maths then said that we ought to try to think of what would be happening in ten years time. The headmaster's wife then said that it did not matter what happened in ten years time.

The headmaster then said that it did matter.

#### Accounts of the Meeting

At the end of the meeting it was agreed that the headmaster, the assistant headmaster and I should each write an account of the meeting and that these accounts should form a basis for a further account, written by the headmaster, but on which all three of us were to agree before it was submitted to the governors meeting. As I had recorded an almost verbatim account of all that was said - what I include above is an abbreviated version - I submitted this as my evidence.

Below I include both the assistant headmaster's

and the headmaster's account. I received the assistant headmaster's account as I said in my letter of 2nd March to the chairman of the governors - five days later at 6.45p.m on the evening before the governors' meeting. The headmaster's account, which I also include, I received at the same time, so there could have been no question of all three of us combining to produce a final account for the governors. It seems that the headmaster's account is based on the assistant headmaster's, but the headmaster's is, in my view, fairer.

## The assistant headmaster's account

Pre-prep. - Extraordinary Staff Meeting 25.02.87

1. 3 Sites were outlined by the headmaster.

Site A. (Stables) (for which plans had been approved)  
pro: purpose-built, near school (but not too near), - dining room, good access, releases 2 classrooms for main school, included "Hall" which could be used by main school in hobbies.

Con: stables would have to be moved, some staff might be disturbed during break, lunch hour Mon-Fri, cost £90-100,000

Site B (Water-tower)

Pro - good access, play area: stables would not have to be moved.

Con - too far from school, dining room, might limit further development (e.g. swimming pool, hall etc.) cost ?

Site C (Present site)

Pro - save money, all "part of development of shoddy east end of school".

Con - lose video-room (to create 3rd pre-prep. form room), lack of "Hall" space, lack of play area, the presence of pre-prep. will

restrict development of that part of school rather than help it. Cost ?

2. Timing of meeting: too late, the headmaster agreed, but:

- a) he had been ill-otherwise it could have been last term;
- b) any member of staff could have voiced

their doubts via the development committee;

c) it could have been any time during first half of term.

3. Opinions voiced during meeting

- a) Those who teach in pre-prep. were sure plan A was the best.
- b) Some staff favoured plan B because no need to move stables.
- c) Some staff said nothing.
- d) Some favoured plan C because x thousand pounds would be saved to be spent on re-developing the bootroom and showers area of the school.

4. Fear that emerged during meeting.

The pre-prep. will become too big, thus swamping the school with day children, who will take up the places of boarders (on whom depends the profit of the school).

But (replied the headmaster and his wife)

- a) Pre-prep. will be maximum 45 (3 classes between 12-15).
- b) Pre-prep. parents, like all day parents, will be urged and encouraged to board their children eventually: many hope to so do: they cannot however be forced to do so.
- c) We do not aim to lessen the number of boarders, which we hope will remain boys 100, girls 50. With 70 day children next September, the school will be larger (c. 220), hence the need for classrooms at present occupied by the pre-prep.

5. The assistant headmaster's opinion

Go ahead, build the pre-prep. at site A (thus be  
seen to be doing something), ready for use  
September '87

Reasons:

- i) it is the site favoured by those most concerned, decided upon after much consultation with architect, governors etc. for which planning permission has already been received;
- ii) it will "get the pre-prep. out of the way", i.e. out of the very area of the school which everyone is so keen to see 'redeveloped,' the redevelopment of which might then become a more feasible possibility.

## The Headmaster's account

Extraordinary Staff Meeting of 25/2/87 to discuss the siting of the Pre-Prep.

### Three sites under consideration

#### A. The Architect's site (plans approved)

Pro- purpose-built - proximity to facilities - good access, releases 2 classrooms for main school.

Con- proximity to staff accommodation and catering block - resiting of stables which would add £10,000 to costs.

Estimated cost £90,000.

#### B. The Water Tower site

Pro- good access and ready-made play area.

Con- too far from facilities - more difficult for the headmaster's wife to remain available for prospective parents and children - might limit future development (indoor pool?).

Estimated cost?

#### C. The eastern end of the Main House site (agreement has already been reached at Development Committee stage that improvements are necessary)

Pro: encourages development in a 'grotty area' - does not add much to overall maintenance.

Con: lack of hall space for pre-prep. and difficult over play area, though other side of drive a possibility - might be seen as a temporary measure by pre-prep parents - something of a hotch-potch - main school would lose video room to create 3rd pre-prep. form room. Estimated cost?

### Timing of the meeting

It was suggested that such a meeting was too late and that hasty decisions might be made because:-

- a) plans for site A had already been passed;
- b) pressure on present pre-prep. facilities;
- c) increased numbers in the pre-Prep.

H.M. agreed but

- a) he had been ill,
- b) architect had acted on advice from development committee of October 1986,
- c) objections to site A had really come to the fore at development committee of Feb. 1987.

### Opinions voiced during meeting

- a) Those who teach in the pre-prep. liked site A for the advantages stated above - they felt that such a site provided independence within the context of the main campus. Present facilities are very cramped. Others felt that it was expensive, would lead to unnecessary added expense of moving stables, and would not benefit the school as a whole.
- b) Few people favoured site B.
- c) Majority seemed to favour site C for advantages stated above. It was felt that the whole school should benefit from improvements. Many expressed fears that the development in, and of, the pre-prep. would lead to school being filled with day children, who do not produce the necessary profits.
- d) The assistant headmaster felt that it was necessary to be seen to be doing something and by choosing site A the pre-prep. would be 'got out of the way' thus releasing an area which we

may wish to be redeveloped.

NB Throughout the meeting constant fears were expressed over the future ratio of boarding and day children and the increased size of pre-prep. in September 87.

H.M. commented:

- a) It was his intention that the school should remain primarily a boarding school.
- b) Prospective parents were always informed of the boarding nature of the school, and made aware that it would be expected of their children.
- c) Control would have to be applied.
- d) There was a tendency towards more day education both for financial and social reasons and many parents would perhaps like to use the school for their children's early years and then move them at 11 years.

My "improper" Letter to the Chairman of the Governors

Copies to: The headmaster, the assistant headmaster, a governor, and the staff.

To the chairman of the governors.

Monday 2nd March 6.50p.m.

Dear Chairman,

I enclose a copy of the notes I made at the Staff Meeting, of Wednesday 25th February 4.30 p.m., about the siting of the pre-prep. After the meeting the assistant headmaster and I agreed with the headmaster that the assistant headmaster and I should each write accounts of the meeting. This was to assist, along with further discussion amongst us three, the headmaster in writing a summary of the views of the staff. This summary was to have been posted to the governors on Friday 27th February. I wrote my account on the night of the 25th, and gave copies to the headmaster and assistant headmaster and the staff at 9.00 a.m. the following morning. All the staff have agreed my account is fair. Having heard nothing more about the matter by Saturday morning, I asked the headmaster if anything had been written for the governors. He said he had not yet written but that he would consult with the assistant headmaster and me before sending anything.

I am writing this letter because it is now Monday 6.45p.m. and I have only just received copies of the assistant headmaster's notes and the headmaster's recommendations, neither of which do I think are a fair representation of the staff view. All the main school staff, except two who have expressed no view, are in favour of looking in detail at plan C. The only people in favour of plan A are the headmaster and his wife,

the assistant headmaster and his wife, the two teachers in the pre-prep, and, I think but I am not sure, the bursar. Also, having glanced quickly through the headmaster's recommendation, the point B, under 'the headmaster agreed but .... "architect had acted on advice from development committee of October 1986" - it was in fact on the advice of the F & GP committee and the assistant headmaster.

The main school staff fear that the governors might decide to implement plan A (referred to in my notes) before sufficient time has been given for detailed consideration of plan C. (Plan C, it is felt, could easily be tens of thousands of pounds less expensive, and hence it is favoured by a vast majority of the main school staff for this and a number of other relevant reasons). As I understand the position, the development committee are to make the final decision on March 10th, but, I am informing you of this now because I am under much pressure from the main school staff to ensure that their strongly held view (that plan A should not be implemented and that plan C should be considered in detail) is emphatically conveyed to you before the governors' meeting tomorrow.

This whole question is made particularly difficult by the inevitable fact that the headmaster's wife is the main proponent of implementing plan A. Any well-intentioned member of staff proposing an alternative plan is made to feel that he or she is considered disloyal. This is the result of the absence of any attempt to conceal disapproval of not only the plan - in this case C - but also its proposers. Understandably, few, if any, find it possible to rise above the psychological pressures in such situations. But it is essential that some of us do for the good of the school, which is the most important entity, not those who run it. However, my sympathies are not only with

all those of us who are labelled as trouble makers, but also with the headmaster who is in an unenviable position.

With best wishes,

yours sincerely

David

P.S. Incidentally the point that these objections could have been raised earlier is not valid because the devel. cttee. meeting of just before Christmas was cancelled.

P.P.S. I enclose a copy of my paper.

### My comments on my action

I wrote the above letter mainly because, as staff representative, I felt under considerable pressure from other staff to counter what appeared to be unfair manoeuvrings by the headmaster and his assistant. My personal opposition to site A was also strong, but I would not have written the letter had I not been the staff representative. I felt I had to do something, and that, had I done nothing and the governors had adopted plan A, then in future I would have felt that I had not done all I should. However, I was at the same time concerned about sending the letter because I knew it would not be well received, and that it would put me further in to disfavour. Nevertheless, in the heat of the moment, I sent the letter.

### All three sites rejected

In the event the governors rejected all three sites and recommended the architect looked for a fourth site, not far from site A, but which, if built on, would not require existing buildings to be moved. Such a site was found and subsequently used for the new prep.

### My letter returned

My letter was, apparently, condemned at the governor's meeting. It was returned to me with a curt letter from the chairman.

### What, if I had not sent the letter?

One of the governors later told me that he thought that, had I not sent the letter, the governors would have chosen site C. According to him, the governors generally were more in favour of site C than we, many

of the staff, suspected - perhaps that was why the headmasters appeared to behave unfairly - and would have voted for it but could not because, had they, they might have been seen to have been supporting the staff and the thrust of my fairly critical letter, against the headmaster; my letter had made them feel this more strongly. I confess I had not thought of this at the time, though I was not in a position to have known what the general view of the governors was; however, to some extent I feel I should have anticipated the possibility of the governors' favouring plan C.

#### The site chosen

I now feel that the site which was eventually chosen is probably better than A, B or C. I don't claim any credit for this outcome, but the site and buildings seem to have worked well in practice.

#### **My Objections to the Buildings**

My objections to the building were that it was too big in that it could accommodate fifty children, and too elaborate and therefore unnecessarily expensive. I still object to the size on the ground that it leads to the main school having too great an intake from the pre-prep; my objections to the cost, however, seem to have eased over the years but I still feel we could and should have got more than we did for our money at the time.

#### The significance of this issue

I include this subsection specifically about the pre-prep. issue, as well as making several references to it in other sections, for the reasons I give below.

1. It seemed to be an issue which had a crucial

influence on the future of the school.

2. It was an issue which stimulated spirited, and sometimes heated, debate between some staff and headmasters.
3. The weight of staff opposition to plan A seemed to lead to the headmasters' trying to support their case by devious means.
4. The reaction of many staff to these "devious means" further raised the temperature of the interacting over this issue.
5. I felt, and still feel, I allowed myself to be pressurised in to taking action, in the form of writing the letter to the chairman, about which I felt uneasy at the time. This, combined with my letter being returned and the decision of the governors, provided a sort of watershed for my personal actions in attempts to effect change. Since then I have had only two brief direct confrontations with the headmaster over policy or, indeed, over anything at all.

My Subsequent Avoidance of Direct Confrontation with Headmasters and Governors

Since the controversy over the pre-prep. I have tried to avoid opposing the headmaster and governors directly. I have resolved to try not to become drawn in to emotionally strenuous controversy because it now seems clearer to me that the headmasters and governors have the power to do what they like - the board of governors is a self perpetuating body which appoints the headmaster - and that they are likely to become more determined to use this power in the face of vigorous staff opposition. A sort of symmetrical

schismogenesis (in Watzlawicks terminology) seemed to occur as a result of the division of opinion over the pre-prep. issue.

Since the controversy only twice - both times in private - have I directly opposed the headmasters.

### **The Dismissal of an Unsuitable Teacher**

The first of these issues concerned the treatment of a teacher - to a large extent an unsuitable character, in my view - who was appointed by the headmaster but who subsequently soon was at variance with him, and was later, in March 1987, dismissed. This occurred soon after I sent my letter about the pre-prep. siting.

I felt I was in a difficult position because, while I thought this teacher unsuitable and that it would be better for him and the school if he left, at the same time I thought he was being very badly treated, so I tried to do what I could for him.

### **My Opposition to the building of a sports hall**

In the second case I opposed the headmaster and assistant headmaster in a meeting of the development committee. The headmasters proposed the building of a sports hall and tabled a forceful paper, a copy of which had been given to me the night before.

I proposed we should spend money on rooms and equipment for teaching instead.

### **Chairman's sympathy**

The chairman showed some sympathy with my view. Though clearly he felt he owed more loyalty to the two headmaster's he did, nevertheless, write a paper for

the following meeting arguing in favour of spending money on buildings for teaching. For the same meeting I wrote a paper, to which I referred in my previous chapter, about how we might improve academic standards; I concluded that this could be achieved mainly through changing our organisation, rather than through new buildings. The headmaster accepted my proposals and said he would implement them, but he never did so; they were attractive to him because they involved spending little money, so he could still have his sports hall.

The chairman's paper initiated plans for new science, maths, art and technology rooms, for which in July 1990 planning permission was received. Though I had not advocated this sort of development in my paper for the January 1988 meeting, I am much in favour of it now because the relevant departments have all expanded in terms of members of staff and would, in my view, benefit considerably from being housed in purpose built accommodation.

### Some significance in my action

I believe that the position I adopted at the 15th December 1987 meeting played a part in prompting the chairman to pursue this development. It seems he noted that I referred to the ISJC report in the December 1987 meeting; both of us quoted from it, for different purposes, in our papers for the January 1988 meeting; I have referred to this in more detail in my section on academic standards.

### **Planning Permission Granted for the Sports Hall**

Planning permission for a sports hall was eventually granted, but it has since been decided to defer its construction and divert the money towards buildings

and resources for teaching.

My approach to change since the controversy over the siting of the new pre-prep.

Since the controversy over the siting of the new pre-prep. I have not taken part in arguments over controversial issues, or indeed any issues. This is because I have felt I previously created a context in which any controversial arguments I proposed would be seen by the headmasters as being intentionally threatening. Instead I have given my attention to issues in functioning; I have tried to indicate means of attending to issues by offering theories I have acquired during my research; with these theories as bases I have proposed modification of, or additions to, the school's organisation. Examples of these are my proposals for the raising of academic standards, and for the improvement of standards of discipline.

Suggestions in response to concerns

Except for some - to my mind uncontroversial - suggestions for improvements in discipline which I offered unsolicited at the end of the summer term of 1990, I have made suggestions only in response to concerns raised by the headmaster. This is for two reasons. First, almost all the suggestions I have volunteered in the past have either not been adopted, or, they have been implemented in such an attenuated form as to be virtually ineffective. Secondly, I have sensed that my volunteering suggestions has been found by the headmasters to be threatening and hence I have felt there has been opposition to me which has been inspired by a context which has arisen as a result of some of my past actions. Thirdly, and partly because of the previous two reasons, I have felt recently that my suggestions would probably be considered only in cases

where there is a need already recognised by the head-masters and several staff, and where I can offer theory and proposals for action in relatively unthreatening ways.

#### A resolution not to argue vigorously

I have resolved not to argue vigorously in favour of my ideas because I feel this can stimulate greater, and disproportionate, opposition. Instead, I try to offer suggestions, gently, with plenty of supporting theory, initially. I then try to stand back and allow my suggestions to be either adopted or not, as the case may be, but I am not averse to offering them again if concerns persist.

I have been utilising this method in response to concerns regarding discipline raised by headmasters and staff at end of the Spring term 1991. In relation to these my intention is to try to demonstrate that effective modifications can be implemented on the basis of new theory. If success results and is acknowledged I will then turn my attention to trying to make improvements to the academic system in a similar way. An opportunity already exists in that all staff have been asked to incorporate in to their teaching the content and assessing procedures of the National Curriculum.

### Summary

Initially I opposed the pre-prep., in accord with many of the staff, partly influenced I am sure by the previous headmaster. The new headmaster and his wife and the assistant headmaster and his wife, and the governors, were emphatically in favour of a pre-prep., and so the issue became a source of tension between the two sides.

We soon realised, however, that opposing the pre-prep. was a waste of time because the running of such a department was the forte of the new headmaster's wife; indeed she had started such an enterprise at her previous school and had come to us with the explicit intention of starting another. Also, our three local rivals had started pre-prep. departments, so there was a danger we might have lost children to them. This, combined with the fact that the headmaster did not seem inclined to work hard at recruiting boarders, even though he had explicitly committed himself to doing so, made it seem sensible to support starting a pre-prep. on a small scale.

### Boarding market contracting

In support of his arguments for a pre-prep. the headmaster had frequently told us that because the boarding market was contracting generally, we needed a pre-prep. to survive. This was countered, by some of us, with the argument that there were still parents in the country who wanted their children to board, and so, if we wanted to keep our boarding numbers up, we had to work harder at attracting boarders, from further afield.

Had I been headmaster at the time I think I would have opened a pre-prep. of thirty - ten in each of

three year groups - which was the number our governors were recommending at the time. Then I would have tried hard to recruit boarders to keep the boarding numbers up; an improvement in academic standards would have helped here. I would have resorted to expanding the pre-prep. only if necessary.

At the time I knew that one of our governors who had service connections had offered to put our headmaster in touch with an organisation which probably would have provided us with several boarders from naval families. Our headmaster had declined to pursue the idea. This seemed indicative of his real intentions.

#### The number in the pre-prep.

The number thirty was the maximum set by the governors because it was the minimum number that was in their views, viable. They too were known to be concerned about the effects of too big a pre-prep. on the main school.

Thirty seemed a sensible number because, though it was viable, it would have meant that only ten children per year would have entered the main school from the pre-prep. The approved number for each year group in the main school is 35 which allows for an A stream form of about 20, and a B stream form of about 15. An intake of 10 per year from the pre-prep. would still have allowed for 25 places for children from elsewhere, some, though not necessarily all, of whom could have been boarders. Because we already received children from the pre-preps. of our rivals, it seemed that the chances were that most of those who were intended to be day children would, in future, probably be entered through our pre-prep.

Boarding and day numbers, 1982-1991

Below is an updated version of the table I offered at the extraordinary staff meeting of February 25th 1987.

	Boarders	Day	Income equivalent in boarders
1982	156	33	178 (i.e. 156+2/3 of 33)
1983	164	32	186
1984	150	39	176
1985	147	39	173
1986	142	48	174
1987	137	71	184
1988 guess	(100)	(100)	(166)
1988	142	64	184
1989	127	68	172
1990	140	71	187
1991	119	70	166

As can be seen my prediction has not been born out, though boarding numbers have not recovered; recently the boarding number has decreased markedly with no significant increase in the day number; this I attribute to the recession and the headmaster's inability to attract enough boarders, rather than the effect of the pre-prep.

The pre-prep. has continued to contribute around fifteen children a year to the main school. As there are five year groups in the main school and five fifteen are seventy five, the number of day children is

now probably about what can be expected in the future.

Attempting to convert some of the day children to boarders, which is the headmaster's present policy, seems to overlook the fact that we need more children, preferably boarders. I suggest this supports my view that we should be looking further afield for boarders.

Nevertheless, given the present situation, I suggest we continue to run the pre-prep. at fortyfive, sending up fifteen children a year, and not at thirty, which I consider to be the ideal, until the boarding number has recovered. I believe the boarding market still exists, because many other schools have some boarders, some of whom could have come to us; but I think it needs to be worked at harder.

Part V consists of one chapter, Chapter 19: 'My perception of change in my thinking and acting since starting this enquiry,' which is an attempt to show - partly by demonstrating change of words which have held me - how in my perception my thinking and acting have changed. I relate change in my theory to how I feel I act now, and how I now feel about actions I took in the past: some of those described in Part IV particularly.

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This enquiry.  
Change in me.  
I act and think differently.  
Key words.  
Words and change in me.  
Suppositions and words.  
Early words.  
Analysis and reason.  
Universally applicable principles.  
Conflict over perceived principles.  
Conflict over the future of the school.  
Last open conflict.  
Logic and analysis.  
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Remarks on some of the words and phrases which seem to have held me before I began, and in the early stages of, this enquiry. p.598

Some of the words and phrases.  
Remarks on some of the early words.

Remarks on some of the words and phrases which are important to me now. p.609

The words

About argument. p.619  
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The evangelical question: my first conflict, a further comment.

My view of why I feel less annoyed and frustrated p.626

What I could have said.

I said nothing.

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Junior school teachers have no guidelines.

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Erroneous supposition.

Change in words, ideas and concerns.

Concern with aspects of functioning.

Arguing and points of view.

Defence of points of view.

CHAPTER 19.      MY PERCEPTION OF CHANGE IN MY  
THINKING AND  
ACTING SINCE STARTING THIS ENQUIRY

This Enquiry

My enquiry concerns change in the school, some of my acting in relation to change in the school, and change in me. It is an attempt to understand more of how some things happen in the school. Hence it is partly concerned with how minds do and do not change.

Change In Me

I act and think differently

Now that much of this study is written, but before I read it in order to make retrospective comments on change, it seems useful to consider apparent change in me. I feel I act and think differently since starting this enquiry, and so I intend to try to examine some of that which is held in my mind which influences my thinking now, before my thinking is affected by re-reading my work. I will also try to examine what made me think and act as I did before I started this enquiry.

Key words

In this examining I give attention to some of the key words which concerned me prior to, and early in, my enquiry, and some of the key words which concern me now. I do this in a belief that I am, and have been, held by words and the ideas they have supported for me.

## Words and Change In Me

### Suppositions and words

In acting I have been held by a range of suppositions about what holds and governs the behaviour of individuals and groups of people. Some of my suppositions seem to have changed beneficially; I am not aware that any have changed detrimentally. Some of these suppositions can be indicated with words - I am not sure whether all can; I suspect they can not. I can not refer here to suppositions which cannot be indicated with words.

Part of the point of the enquiry could be regarded as the putting into words of those suppositions which I have changed and those working theories I have gained through acting and enquiring.

I can only refer to those changes in me of which I am aware and for which I have words. It may be that I am only aware of those changes for which I have words. I am held by words because so much communicating is dependent on them, so much so that I communicate with myself with them; hence my concepts, notions and awareness are more or less held in place by words.

### Early Words

### Analysis and reason

When I began enquiring much of the language I used was influenced by my scientific training and my attraction to analytical and rational thinking, which resulted from my limited exposure to analytical and rational philosophical thinking. The language I used supported my belief in the usefulness of analysis and the defining of aspects of problems. It also supported

the reasoning which underpinned my attempts at solutions to problems.

### Universally applicable principles

The language also supported a belief in universally applicable principles and a need to act to try to uphold them. This led me in to conflict with individuals and groups who had more power than me in the organisation: the governors, headmaster and assistant headmaster for example.

### Conflict over perceived principles

In some cases this conflict arose because some of the actions of these groups and individuals seemed to me to be at variance with what I thought their principles ought to be as a result of their official positions and/or declared or implicitly held beliefs.

### Conflict over the future of the school

In some other cases conflict arose because I disagreed over matters which I regarded as crucial to the direction of the school.

The evangelical issue is an example of the former, and the pre-prep. issue is an example of the latter.

### Last open conflict

The last issue concerning which I engaged in direct conflict was of the latter type and concerned the proposed building a new sports hall. I opposed this vigorously in a development committee meeting in the presence of the chairman of the governors, another governor and the headmaster and assistant headmaster. I argued that we should spend money on the academic

side of the school not the sports.

The conflict between the headmaster and me became acrimonious. I had not intended this at all. It upset me and so, in a successful attempt at conciliation, I helped research the sports hall project, and wrote a paper outlining my view regarding future development; this included complimentary remarks about the headmaster as well as an outline of my proposals for improving academic standards. Thus I withdrew from what I felt could easily have become a long running conflict as arose over the pre-prep. issue. [As it turned out, though planning permission for the Sports hall was granted, the project was eventually shelved]

### Logic and analysis

When I started I believed in the use of applying reason, logic and analysis universally, not only for assessing situations and problems but also in formulating solutions for problems. I was aware that to bring about lasting change in functioning - though I did not use this word - lasting change in the control of that functioning had to be implemented, but I did not see this in systemic terms.

### Discussion argument and consensus

I also believed that, through discussion, people's view would change as a result of argument, and that this was a valuable means of forming a consensus which could provide objective justification for acting.

I now have less faith in argument as a means to changing people's views, which I now regard as being more stable than I did; I see this stability as resulting from a complex mental support mechanism which includes social and psychological forces, suppositions

emotions, context markers and speculations. Hence, facts and reasons are only a small part of the means by which we decide how we feel about an issue; because of this, arguments can play only a small part in affecting how we feel. What we see as "facts" are also often affected by other factors such as suppositions, emotions and speculations. Many of my views, and hence many of the bases for my actions, are based on speculation. I ascribe this characteristic of my thinking to the thinking of others because my experience seems to support this idea.

Remarks on Some of the Words and Phrases Which Seem to  
Have Held Me Before I Began, and in the Early Stages  
of, This Enquiry

Some of the Words and Phrases

Abuse of power/ privilege	facts	truth
agreement	fairness	
aims		
analysis	honesty	weakness
argument	hypocrisy	
attitude		
authority	indoctrination	
beliefs	irrationality	
clarity, (particularly of intentions)	justification	
cliquiness	language	
common ground		
communication		
confrontation		
consensus	meaning	
consideration (for others)		
consistency	openness	
courage	objectives	
declaration (of intentions)	objectivity	
definition	philosophy	
discussion	prejudice	
emotion	principles	
evidence	problem	
examination (of justification)	rationality	
explanation	reason	
evidence	selfishness	
	solution	

### Remarks on some of the early words

**Abuse of power, privilege**  
**Suppression of information,**  
**Cliquiness**

From my experience these are types of generalised behaviour or habits which are very difficult if not impossible to change through argument, particularly from a position of virtually no official power.

### **Agreement**

An agreement can be an agreeing to agree.

### **Aims, Objectives, Clarity**

I thought it important that these should be clearly established and defined and based on a rational justification. I still feel this is important but I am now also concerned with how functioning can be permanently modified and controlled by instituting new routines: here I suggest I have benefited from an introduction to systems thinking.

### **Analysis, definition**

I believed in the importance of defining problems and in the analysis of the words which arose. I still believe this to be a useful initial approach to concerns in functioning, but I now realise that having applied systematic thinking, systemic thinking has to be considered.

### **Argument, Facts, Reasons and Logic**

I believed that argument was an effective means of changing people's views and hence their actions.

As a result of my awareness that people's views and actions are held, by powerful forces - including suppositional states - apart from facts and reason, I argue less now.

### **Attitudes**

I saw good attitudes as dependent on good thinking, and that the study of philosophy was a means by which these could be achieved. Now I feel that good attitudes may result from good education over a long term, but I do not now feel that attitudes can be changed by training in thinking alone. I am aware that attitudes are very hard to change, even for their holders, and I regard them as systemically fairly stable states because for the holder to want to change his or her attitude he or she often needs already to have a different attitude, which is necessarily not the case. Attitudes are hence circular because they support themselves.

### **Authority**

I saw discussion and argument as means to achieving agreement, common ground or consensus which could serve as an authority on which justification for action could be based. I still feel discussion is valuable but, partly as the result of experience and partly for the theoretical reasons I have given for limits of efficacy of argument, I am now aware of limits of discussion if applied to functioning in the absence of systemic thinking.

### **Consideration for Others**

I regarded those I considered selfish as solely lacking consideration for others. I thought that the justification for the necessity for consideration for

others could be derived from a notion of respect for persons which seemed to me to be a necessary precondition for interaction with others. Here I was influenced by my reading R.S. Peter's book *Ethics and Education*.

I was concerned with lack of consideration which was displayed in the handling of school affairs. My policy now is to attempt to counter it only when it affects me directly and I feel there is something I can actually do about it.

Now I am convinced that infrequent complaints about general behaviour are ineffective as attempts to change this behaviour. Undesirable generalised behaviour seems to require frequent control in the form of negative feedback in order to be changed. In most cases in my experience with adults in the school I am either not in a position, or not inclined, to try to institute such feedback.

**Consistency (Lack of)**

**Irrationality**

**Prejudice**

**Selfishness**

The above are further types of behaviour characteristics which it seems to me difficult, if not impossible, to modify through argument.

**Courage, Weakness**

I felt that the previous headmaster and present headmaster and assistant headmaster all lacked courage in that they avoided confrontation in many instances where I felt there should have been confrontation, not only with the children but also with members of staff and governors. I still regard this as true, but my ex-

perience is that criticizing them does not change their general behaviour.

### **Discussion**

I was convinced of the importance of discussion amongst involved parties in attempts to resolve concerns. I believed that discussion was a means to the establishing of common ground which would lead to desirable changes in functioning.

I now regard human behaviour, on which functioning depends, as much more governed by habits which are not changed easily and require changes in tensions or forces within their systemic context in order to be changed.

### **Explanations, Meanings, Beliefs, Facts and Evidence**

I believed in the examination of these as a means to changing peoples views and hence actions.

### **Fairness**

I felt that the staff were not treated fairly, as I thought they should be; in particular there was discrimination against the non-evangelical staff, in my view.

### **Honesty**

I felt people, especially those in positions of particular power in the school such as headmasters and governors, should try to be open and truthful about what they were trying to do, and I thought it reasonable to question their practices publicly if I thought they were not adhering to the principles I held for them.

My assumption that the governors would have had clearly stated aims in the selection of a new headmaster and my questioning the chairman on this during the dispute over the evangelical influence on the school gives an illustration of how I thought and acted.

I now see that it was very unlikely that the governors would have had a clear consensus on this, and that if they had, they would have felt too rigidly held by it. I also see that it was unlikely that the governors as a body would have accepted my arguments because amongst the board was a range of metaphysical positions very different from mine.

I was closed to the fact that the governors were separately and differently closed by their beliefs being based on suppositions which were supported by their experiences, and of which they were not necessarily aware.

To have a chance of having one supposition changed through argument, an individual has to become sufficiently open, psychologically, to be able to be made aware that the supposition exists as a supposition. To change many suppositions amongst many individuals - which is arguably what I have been trying to do from time to time - clearly requires much to happen, much of which will not happen because of a tendency to psychological closure amongst people. This closure I have likened to the idea of systemic stability.

In many cases an individual has to be favourable towards changing a supposition to be able to change it: this is what I suggest is often meant by the expression: "having an open mind".

## **Hypocrisy**

I felt that the evangelical headmaster and assistant headmaster and governors in many instances, particularly in dealings with staff, did not act according to what I assumed to be their Christian principles. I felt there was a lot of selfish action particularly from the evangelical types. I still feel this was true but I feel they did not see their principles as I did, and in any case they saw them as there to be aimed at but not necessarily achieved.

My experience is that openly criticizing them has not changed their general behaviour.

## **Justification**

I tried to justify my ideas and hence my proposals for change on the grounds of what I thought the aims of education should be, or, more locally, what I thought the implied aims of the school were. I am now aware that this approach has limited efficacy as a result of the range of forces, including suppositional states, which hold people.

However, I still think it is worthwhile to ask the question: "What are we trying to do?"

## **Laziness**

This seemed to be a weakness in the new headmaster. It seemed he did not wish to be bothered with many of the jobs his predecessor had done. His lack of concern and effort as regards the running of the boys' boarding accommodation illustrated this. Again, I now regard this as a very difficult characteristic to change in someone because it is dependent on attitudes, suppositions and beliefs.

## **Logic**

I thought that the actions of people in power over others should logically follow from declared intentions.

## **Openness and Clarity In Stating Aims**

I felt that those who exercised power which affected other people's lives should state clearly and publicly what their aims were. I regarded good leadership as partly dependent on clearly thought out, well justified and clearly stated aims. I still believe in this as an ideal, but I am aware of the unlikelihood, and some of the drawbacks of too much openness.

## **Problem**

I regarded difficulties which arose in functioning, such as the long running concern about discipline in the school, as problems which were soluble through analysis and examination of the meanings of the words which arose in the analysis. My paper on discipline of September 1981 illustrates this. Here again my theory was that both people's perception of problems and their behaviour in relation to them would change for the better if they examined what I regarded as the relevant concepts more carefully.

I now prefer to regard problems as concerns. In their resolution I still regard analysis as valuable, but I also now try to apply systemic thinking; this should become clearer in my comments on the new words which hold me.

## **Philosophy, Epistemology and Indoctrination**

I thought that philosophy gave me a distance from what held the thought of others.

I thought some of the preaching and teaching of the evangelicals in the school was indoctrinatory. I thought the type of knowledge with which they were concerned was based on more tenuous justification than their conviction implied. I attacked them partly on this ground. I had no evidence of harmful effects resulting from what they did. I still think some of the teaching and preaching is offensively indoctrinatory, and I dislike it, but I am not aware it has had harmful effects on the children. Hence I consider that the children are free and capable of making up their own minds.

By indoctrination I meant teaching which had a deliberate and biased intention of influencing people towards a particular view with no tolerance of any other possible views.

When I consider my own suppositions I realise that I am responsible for sorts of indoctrination in my teaching, though I do try to make this clear to the pupils when I am aware of it. Hence I now see indoctrination much more as just a word which labels a concept which can cause more trouble than the reality to which it is applied. The word indoctrination first concerned me seriously through reading R.S. Peters's book Ethics and Education.

## **Selfishness**

I objected to self centred behaviour displayed by those - often evangelicals - with power.

## **Truth**

I believed in absolute truth. I am now aware that absolute truth is inaccessible on account of individual differences in perception, and relativity as regards space and time.

## Remarks on Some of the Words and Phrases Which are Important to me Now

### The words

analysis	metaphysics
analogy	metasystem
analogical thinking	mind
attitude	mind as a system
ceilings of ability/ potential	organisation
concern	
conflict	
consideration for others	potential
context (levels of: local and more general)	potential for change
context as a system,	potential to stay the same
context markers	potential of a mind
control (particularly of systems)	power
equifinality	power and control
feedback	prospect for change
functioning	psychological closure/ openness
habit	resolution
homeorhesis	
homoeostasis	schism
information	schismogenesis (compl- ementary and symmetrical)
information flow	
information collecting	
information and control	social/psychological forces
issue	suppositions
location of power	systematic
logical confusion of levels of behaviour	systemic
logical levels	systemic stability
logical types	
metalanguage	
metaphor	

## Remarks on the later words

### **Analysis**

The breaking down of descriptions of perceptions into component parts for the purposes of thinking about them.

### **Analogy, Analogical Thinking**

The borrowing of ideas from and about one context and applying them to another apparently similar context in an attempt to understand and or attend to that second context better.

### **Attitude**

A form of relatively long term mental outlook which has systemic stability as does a habit: an attitude may be regarded as a mental habit.

Attitudes seem to arise from a complexity of psychological forces and states, including suppositions, and as a result they tend to have systemic stability. A holder of an attitude finds it hard to change that attitude because to do so he or she needs to want to do so, and to want to do so he or she needs to have a different attitude. Hence pragmatic paradox in Watzlawick's sense can arise here.

The word 'attitude' is an abstract noun and as such lacks the stability which it sometimes seems to imply.

Attitudes can be about individual people, actions, groups or institutions.

Attitudes can be held about or towards specific

things or they can be more general states of mood.

Attitudes can result from states of knowledge, of security, insecurity, confidence, lack of confidence, all of which are based on suppositions about things outside oneself or inside oneself.

Attitudes in individuals can not be known directly by other people, but their manifestations can appear in behaviour.

### **Concern**

What might otherwise be considered a problem, though the word 'problem' suggests, for me, too much expectation of the possibility of a logically worked solution.

### **Conflict**

Result of incompatibility between systems e.g. conflict between individual minds or conflict between different groups of people.

### **Context as a System**

A context can be regarded as a system in terms of it's being an interacting which has a life: while it exists questions can be asked about what supports what holds it in place and what, if anything, causes it to change - the notion of feedback is relevant here.

### **Context Markers**

Information inherent in the context of an interacting which can affect the course of that interacting, e.g. when an argument becomes heated the course of that argument can become more affected by the heated context than it is affected by its factual and rational

content; the personalities involved in the argument would almost certainly have brought context markers, associated with perceptions of them, to the argument.

### **Control**

Frequent monitoring and modification of what is happening in a system.

### **Equifinality**

A property of systems whereby they maintain a constant state in spite of being subjected to a variety of inputs, e.g. the school's maintaining a largely steady state in spite, in some cases, of attempts to improve discipline and academic standards.

### **Feedback**

An output of a system fed back into that system as a control mechanism; in the case of managing a system, this output can be modified by management before it is returned to the system; this functioning of management can be regarded as metasystemic, but the system and metasystem together, from a different level of perception from the initial one, can also be regarded as one system.

### **Generalised Behaviour**

Behaviour displayed generally in the form of a habit; such frequently occurring behaviour usually requires frequently occurring control for the behaviour pattern to be modified.

### **Habit**

I regard habits as generalised behaviour patterns,

and I consider generalised behaviour patterns are characteristic of human beings: such patterns are hard to break and hard to establish: habits are systemic phenomena and as such have a degree of systemic stability.

### **Homeorhesis**

Stable flow in a system achieved partly by negative feedback control.

### **Homoeostasis**

Stable blockage of flow in a system.

### **Information**

Any identifiable entity physical or non physical.

### **Information Flow**

Movement of information

### **Information and Control**

There is a need for relevant information about a system in order to control that system; the output of the system provides information and control can in some cases be exercised by modifying the inputs and/or feedback in to that system.

### **Issue**

A set of ideas and actions relating to a particular subject, which collectively establish an identity for themselves.

## **Logical Types**

An attempt to establish differences in logical levels can assist in better understanding of what happens: e.g. someone's attitude is of a different logical type from the specific instances of behaviour which manifest that attitude.

## **Metalanguage**

The prefix meta denotes a change of position or condition, hence metalanguage can be language about language or it can be the result of a change in the type of language used about a certain subject; for example in my discussion of concerns about discipline in the school my language has changed from being largely analytical towards being analogical showing concern for systemic phenomena: feedback and control in particular. My being held by different words now, is evidence of my adoption of a metalanguage as regards my functioning in the school as an overall system, even though the change in words has been accompanied by a change in the sort of aspects of issues with which I have been concerned. I.e. I have become more concerned with modifying how people and systems of people function than changing how and what they think.

## **Metaphor**

### **Analogy**

## **Metaphysics**

I have come to regard certain types of metaphysics as important, as I describe in my section on the subject; I regard people's metaphysical states as important in the maintenance of stability in their thinking.

## **Metasystem**

A system set up to control another system.

## **Mind as a System**

I regard a mind as a complex information system, open in the sense that it is open to inputs from outside - I have tried to elaborate on this in my section on Cartesian dualism - and that as such it has some potential to change.

## **Organisation and Functioning**

A useful distinction can be made between the intentional arrangement of a system, or, in other words, the organisation, and, what actually happens in that system: the functioning. Changes in organisation may not effect intended changes in functioning if they do not change relevant control mechanisms.

## **Paradox**

I have been intrigued by various forms of paradox: semantic, logico-mathematical and pragmatic; and I have found my thinking has to some extent been opened up by my attempts to resolve some of these. Hence I have included a chapter on paradox.

## **Potential**

The optimum state of functioning of an open system which may never be manifested and so may never be experienced; owing to the complexity of open systems and their inputs, their optimum states in many cases can probably not be recognised.

## **Potential of a Mind**

Because I regard a mind as a complex open system I consider it is reasonable to accept that a mind has an ultimate limit of potential but I consider this view inconsequential in that the limit can not be shown.

## **Power and its Location**

It is important to distinguish between official and unofficial power, and to look to see where it lies.

## **Power and Control**

Power is necessary for controlling systems.

## **Prospect for Change**

A permanent change in functioning at a certain level in a system requires a change in the control mechanisms holding that functioning in place because the new functioning must be self controlling to survive; if at a given level functioning remains constant, then an attempt to change its control mechanisms must be made from a higher level to be effective; if long term changes in long established functioning are to be achieved, then long term changes in control have to be established.

## **Psychological Closure and Openness**

Some people seem much more open to changes in their thinking than others. Again, it seems, that those who are more closed need to reach a state in which they are favourable towards change if they are to change. Openness to change seems to require some sort of disturbance which results in experience being questioned.

## **Resolution**

I have come to think in terms of resolving concerns as opposed to solving problems.

## **Schism**

A widening split between two systems as a result of conflict; in complementary schismogenesis one system becomes more subordinate and the other becomes more dominant; in symmetrical schismogenesis two dominant systems compete for supremacy - both complementary and symmetrical schismogenesis can be seen as being self escalating as a result of negative feedback.

## **Social/psychological Forces**

Those forces which impinge on minds and hold people's thinking and acting.

## **Suppositions**

R.G. Collingwood's theory of absolute and relative presuppositions has led me to regard people's thinking as being held partly by suppositional states. I prefer supposition to presupposition because the question of whether something is supposed or presupposed is often not easily resolved.

## **System**

An interacting of bits of information, physical or psychological, or both, which results in a phenomenon which has some integrity and hence can be seen to have identity.

An open system, such as a human being or a colony of ants, takes inputs, such as air, food and informa-

tion, from its environment.

A closed system, such as a clockwork clock, can not take from its environment to sustain itself; when it has been wound up it has potential energy, but once it has run down it has to be wound again; it can not absorb energy for itself from its environment.

An open system can be perceived as being integral with its environment, and as such as being a subsystem of larger systems.

### **Systematic Thinking**

Analytical thinking: digital thinking: thinking about bits of systems or of contexts, as opposed to the whole.

### **Systemic Thinking**

Thinking about interactings as systems, with regard for characteristics inherent in systems, such as: feedback, control and systemic stability.

### **Systemic Stability**

The tendency for an existing system to maintain its identity in spite of individual parts changing.

## About Argument

### Argument and change in me

A change which I think has occurred in me - probably as a result of my enquiry and experience - is that I use argument differently now. This is partly because on several occasions in the past I have argued vigorously with the headmasters and governors about proposals for school development and about change in school policy, to little or no avail.

My belief is that the arguments were relatively fruitless in these cases because I and those with whom I argued were held by a sufficient number of incompatible suppositions and internal and external forces. These can be illustrated by reference to particular issues.

### Pre-prep. argument

In the arguments I entered with the governors and headmasters over the pre-prep. for example, some of the suppositions and forces which in my perception held them, included the following.

#### **Suppositions of My "opponents"**

1. A belief that governors and headmasters' declared intentions should not give way to pressure from staff.
2. It was the headmaster and not the staff who should make policy.
3. The governors appointed the headmaster so they should support his policies.
4. It was better that the school should have a pre-

prep. even if it meant the school became more of a day school with a much more local clientele, if that was what the headmaster wanted.

5. It was acceptable that the headmaster should pursue a policy which would lead to the school becoming predominantly a day school even though it was his declared intention that it should not become so.

6. Headmaster and governors can almost always prevail over opposition from members of staff because the governors and headmasters hold much more power, particularly as regards control over finance and information.

### **My Suppositions**

In the same argument I was also held by suppositions.

I thought that it would not be good for the school to become more of a day school because I thought its essential nature, which was derived from, among other things, a high level of care and a wide variety of extra academic curricular activity, needed a particular type of parent enough of whom would not be found locally. Hence, if we entered into more competition with the other local prep. schools - who seemed to be locally regarded as marginally more successful over the traditional range of limited but quantifiable prep. school pursuits, such as academic work and team games, we might suffer. Here I was resisting change in the early years of a new headmaster; I was, I am sure, influenced by the previous headmaster.

### **Dishonesty and weakness**

I regarded the new headmaster's and the governors'

apparently contradictory stance of declaring the intention to maintain boarding numbers and yet acting against this - in allowing the pre-prep. to grow to fifty in number - as not only dishonest but also weak in that it was a case of giving into the headmaster's wife.

Further comment on the pre-prep. argument.

In the five years we have run a pre-prep. the numbers of day children in the main school have increased and so the school has become more like its local competitors who, incidentally have become a bit more like it in terms of breadth of activity.

Judging by the present figures, 1990, we are now full as regards total places, but slightly down on boarding numbers. Hence the policy of allowing the pre-prep. to increase to fifty has not so far been as disastrous as I predicted at worst. It does seem, however, that our reputation for providing a range of activities in which the less academic child is more likely to find some success, has meant that more of the more academically inclined parents have sent their children to the other local schools.

The previous headmaster seemed to be able to attract parents who were not only academic but who also valued a broad curriculum including plenty of craft, art and music. These parents seemed to provide more children who could succeed academically as well as benefit from the range of activities.

My predictions about the pre-prep. lowering the overall academic ability level seem, from what several staff have said recently, to have been born out. Those who teach the first three years, all of which now contain children who started in the pre-prep., where there

is no form of assessment for entrants, complain of a general fall in standards of academic ability.

Apart from what these teachers say, however, there are no facts and figures on which to base these assertions, because, I suggest, there is no system of regular criterion based assessment in the school. I made some recommendations on this in my section on academic standards.

I argued vigorously over the pre-prep. issue, right through from the early stages of development, in sympathy with most if not all the established staff. The headmasters and governors acted largely in opposition to these views and to make this easier for themselves they changed the membership of the development committee, at an important stage, as I have described.

I still think that the headmaster was motivated partly by laziness in that he did not really want to be bothered by so many boarders, and partly by the influence of his wife. Consequently I felt he was to some extent dishonest in his public declaration of intent. I think many of the governors were not aware of what contributed to the special character of the school. In the past I would have blamed them for not finding out more about the school; now I accept their distance as typical of our governors.

Because my prediction that the school would decrease in size has not so far been born out, I have to ask myself why the school should not be run on the present lines if this is the headmaster's wish. My answer is that I accept that the school can be run thus, and that, given the inclinations of the present headmaster, this is probably a preferable way to run it under the circumstances. However, I am not entirely happy with the present position, and I feel we have yet

to see the ultimate consequences of the rumoured lower level of academic ability advancing through the school.

If the rumour is accurate then I feel it is a bad thing that the staff will be under more pressure to achieve academic success when they are already under considerable pressure, not only to do their teaching, but also to provide a wide range of extra curricular activity. Also, the more we build up a name for catering for the less academically able, the more of them we shall get.

At present I am satisfied that, contrary to my predictions, the school remains full, and I feel content to wait and see if my other predictions are born out; if they are I shall feel satisfied that I have grounds to comment and, in the light of my section on academic standards, I shall feel able to make recommendations. If my predictions are not borne out I shall be pleased.

#### One more argument

Since this particular argument I have been treated with outward circumspection and respect by my opponents and I am the only member of staff to have been retained on a much reduced development committee. Since the arguments over the pre-prep. development, I have only once been involved in conflict with the headmaster and assistant headmaster.

This issue concerned the proposed building of a new sports hall. I opposed this vigorously in a development committee meeting, arguing that money should at that time be spent on the academic side of the school. The conflict between me and the headmasters became acrimonious. This I had not wanted at all. It upset me and I realised that I might have found myself

embarking on another long and drawn out, emotionally wearing and fruitless argument trying to oppose something which the headmasters were determined to carry through. Hence I ceased my opposition but wrote a paper for the committee arguing my case for attending to academic standards.

Though planning permission for the sports hall was acquired, the plans were eventually shelved in favour of spending money on new classrooms and accommodation for boarding girls.

The evangelical question my first conflict, a further comment.

I took action over this not only because I was irritated by what I regarded as the smugness of some of the evangelicals but also because I thought I could destabilise some of their beliefs or the bases for their positions and attitudes. I now take the view that long established beliefs which are supported by suppositional states are much harder to change or destabilise. I also take the view that attempts to destabilise these can, at a context level, result in their being defended more firmly.

I suggest that, at the time I also overlooked the degree of stability that the evangelical group, and individual members of that group, derived from the membership of the group. This, I suggest, contributed not only to the stability of the members' desire to be members, but also, consequently, to the stability of their beliefs and views.

I suggest that the integrity of the group as I perceived it, was threatened not only by criticism, such as mine, but also by attempts, such as mine, by outsiders to establish common ground through detailed

discussion.

The evangelical group's determination to resist entry of potential rivals was shown by the governors' rejecting, on his being proposed, someone, who was in my view an excellent prospective governor, on the grounds of his being a Roman Catholic. This was told to me by one of the few non-evangelical governors around the time of the appointment of the new head-master in 1983.

My View of Why I Feel Less Annoyed  
and Frustrated

November 1990

I need to ask myself why I no longer feel extreme annoyance and frustration with individuals and about developments in the school.

Four days ago I sat through a discussion at a staff meeting about whether or not we ought, and if so how, to attract more boarding boys to the school. This had apparently been discussed at length at a governors' meeting the previous day because we were about ten boarding boys short.

The feeling amongst staff seemed to be that we should try to attract more boarding boys. The question arose as to whether we should do more to get existing day boys to board or whether we should try to attract more full time boarders from further afield.

One member of staff said we could do more to attract children of members of the forces; another said that the existence of the pre-prep. meant that inevitably we would have more day children; another said he thought the overall standard was declining; the assistant headmaster said we needed more clever boys. The headmaster was non-committal.

What I could have said

I could have responded to all this by saying that, first, in the early stages of the planning of the pre-prep. I was against its becoming too large - i.e. more than thirty children in all - because I thought it would result in the numbers of boarders declining to an undesirable extent; secondly I knew that one of the governors had a friend in the Navy who had offered to act as a recruiting agent for us, but this offer had

not been taken up; thirdly, my argument in favour of trying to raise academic standards was put forward in the belief that if we could show that we could prepare more boys for the more academic schools, then we should be more likely to attract the children of the more academically inclined parents who would be more likely to send their children further afield to a good school to be prepared: this I set out in a paper for the development committee in January 1988.

#### **I said nothing**

In spite of knowing what I do and having argued vehemently about all these things before, I said nothing at the meeting. I felt I had said it all before to no avail.

I felt I could again use up a lot of energy with words and not get very far. I felt it would be better if I talked to members of staff about developing my scheme for tackling academic standards. I have already spoken to the head of French who supported the idea. It seems an opportune time because staff are now concerning themselves as far as is possible with the National Curriculum.

#### **The context I have created**

My reluctance to state my views openly about such issues is also resultant from the context I feel I have created by my past actions. I feel that almost any opinion I might express, which in many cases would be contrary to existing policy, would be seen by the headmaster and his assistant as an attempt by me either to cause trouble, or to influence policy away from his thinking and towards mine.

## **My proposals for academic improvement**

To recapitulate my proposals for academic improvement, simply: I intended that we should institute our own system of assessment, throughout the school, in line with what we thought the children should be expected to know and be able to do at successive stages, with a view to finishing the Common Entrance syllabus by the end of the penultimate year as opposed to, now, the final year: this, in order, ultimately, to be able to achieve entrance to the more academic public schools. This could clarify syllabuses objectives and standards for the school.

## **Junior school teachers have no guidelines**

The teachers at the junior end of the school complain that they have no guidelines as regards standards. They also complain that the automatic intake from the pre-prep. at the age of seven, as opposed to those coming in from elsewhere having to be assessed, means that we are admitting some children who are of too low a standard to be able to cope adequately in the school. This has been accentuated by the fact that the headmasters' wife has been inclined to admit as many children as she could to the pre-prep. in spite of the fact that she has been asked, by the headmaster and governors, to limit the intake. This is now at a stage where the headmaster has had to ask his secretary to limit the bookings for places in the pre-prep. but not to tell his wife that this is being done. Clearly the headmaster has difficulty in controlling his wife's management of the pre-prep. However, I suggest he would be able to exercise more control over the main school's intake from the pre-prep. if he were able to appeal to an organised assessment system which had the backing of the heads of the maths and English departments. To his wife he could justify the restrictions

on the grounds that the heads of departments agreed they should be imposed.

### **I am not being drawn**

The point I am trying to make is that although I hear governors, headmasters and staff complain about outcomes of which I forewarned, and, although I am privately dissatisfied with developments in the school's organisation, I am not allowing myself to be drawn into battles of words. I am prepared to watch things develop and work quietly at my ideas such as those for improving academic standards. This does not mean I do not care. I care a great deal.

### **My past and present use of argument**

I feel that in the past I used argument a great deal to try to change things which were outside my realm of power. I now regard argument as now of much less use as far as the context consisting of governors, headmaster and me is concerned. Perhaps my arguing in this context implied an attempt by me to exert power which I did not hold, and perhaps this implication became a context marker.

I also deliberately try to concern myself less with what I perceive as shortcomings in the behaviour of members of this context, because my experience suggests that these shortcomings are not easily changed, certainly not, at any rate, by my drawing attention to them.

During my enquiry, the type of issue which concerns me has changed. I suggest this is partly because I have spent much time and energy and caused myself considerable emotional stress, arguing, largely in vain, with people who have more official power than me

in the organisation.

### **Changes in words**

The changes in my thinking and acting can be indicated by the changes in the words which concern me. Earlier in this section I include a list of some of the words which were particularly significant to me before I began, and early in, this enquiry; there is also a list of some of the words which I find significant now. I have tried to elaborate on the meanings some of these words hold for me, but some further general comment seems appropriate here.

### **Early words emotive; emphasis on consensus**

The early words seem to be more emotive. They indicate, among other things, concern about apparent shortcomings in the behaviour of individuals and groups, as well as concern for principles, clarification, discussion, argument and agreement. They supported my supposition that people's views were readily changed through discussion and argument. They also supported a related supposition which manifested itself in my belief in the utility of establishing, through discussion, a consensus which could provide objective justification for action. At the time I was consciously aware of the second supposition, but not the first, which may therefore have been a presupposition in Collingwood's sense.

### **Erroneous supposition**

In retrospect it seems I held what I now regard as an erroneous supposition, which is that people's views are determined largely by facts and reasons. I am now critical of this view - I do not think I was aware I held it before - and hence my current thinking is that

facts and reasons can play a fairly small part in proportion to emotions, suppositional states and psychological and social forces.

### **Changes in words, ideas and concerns**

I act differently now because I concern myself with a different type of issue. This is because the ideas which hold me, as evidenced by my two lists of words, have changed.

I have shown that the last time direct conflict arose - now nearly three years ago - between the headmasters and me, over the proposed building of a new sports hall, I withdrew from it and responded by writing a constructive paper for the development committee. I did not continue to argue against the headmasters, and I now feel that there would have been no point in doing so.

### **Concern with aspects of functioning**

I now concern myself more with aspects of functioning. I feel that this change in my concern results from: first, my learning more about the limits of my power to effect change in the context consisting of the school and the governors; secondly from the change in the ideas and hence the words which hold me; and thirdly from the change in my perception of the efficacy of argument, within my context.

### **Arguement**

Arguing can engender a competitive element which can stimulate aggression for offensive and defensive purposes.

Arguing implies an attempt to change someone's

point of view. Points of view tend to be defended for various reasons, including some of these:

1. Points of view are supported by suppositions which in turn support beliefs, including prejudices.
2. Ostensibly holding certain points of view can, in some cases, gain the holder favour with powerful people.
3. Overtly changing one's point of view, as a result of contrary argument, can be felt an admission of defeat or an admission of previous poor thinking, or incompetence.
4. Overtly changing one's point of view can, in some cases, be regarded as an admission of previous dishonesty.
5. Some views within contexts of arguments are supported by attitudes. For these attitudes to be changed by the holder, the holder has to be favourable towards changing but to be so, he or she needs to have a different attitude. Hence there is a pragmatic paradox in Watzlawicks sense here. I regard this point as being particularly crucial to many of the arguments in which I have been involved. The points I make here about attitudes I regard as equally applicable to my own attitudes particularly those I held before and earlier in my enquiry; I like to think I am more open now.
6. If suppositions of which the holder is unaware, are to be changed by the argument of another, they have to undergo a change of status in the holder in that the holder has to become aware of them for them to be changed.

I suggest I have reached a state in which:-

1. I understand more of what happens to me and around me;
2. I understand better why much of the energy I have put into arguments about school policy and development has been largely wasted;
3. I concern myself with different types of issue now and I apply a new set of ideas to these;
4. I have a better idea of what is within my power.

As a result of these changes and my perception that the evangelical issue has faded into the background and that all members of staff are now generally much better treated, I feel less anger and frustration. I have come to accept changes which initially I opposed in a particular way, and I have unintentionally reached a position in which I feel I would now not oppose similar changes in such a way.

## PART VI

## CONCLUSIONS

Part VI consists of two chapters, Chapter 20: 'A summary of conclusions.' and Chapter 21: 'Final Remarks. August 1992'.

Chapter 20 is a brief summary of some of the conclusions of the previous chapters. This reflects some of the change in thinking which took place during the enquiry.

Chapter 21 sets out to show that the enquiry is open ended by indicating probable courses for future development: one concerning academic work in the school; and another regarding teaching some philosophy there.

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Metaphysics and systems theory: functioning can be hard to change.  
Systems theory.  
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IntroductionOrigin and DevelopmentPhilosophy and Practical Application

Before starting this enquiry, I thought I could usefully apply philosophy to my work. Initially I was attracted by analytical, systematic thinking, and I tried to apply this in tackling issues within the school. My thinking had not been opened up to accommodate metaphysics - in terms of suppositional states - and the significance of a systems approach to human interactions within given contexts. I have since come to see that knowledge is dependent on context, and that, in attending to issues, usually much more of the context needs to be considered than I had previously supposed. Most issues arise within interactive systems, and so some systems thinking is almost invariably applicable to attending to them.

Consequently, I still think I can usefully apply philosophical thinking to my work, but not merely the thinking influenced by the very limited philosophy I had studied when I started this enquiry.

Metaphysics, theory of interaction, and the philosophy of mind are important

The course I took in the philosophy of education could, in my view, have been considerably improved by the inclusion of sections on metaphysics, the type of theory of interaction put forward by Watzlawick, and some philosophy of mind.

## Systems and the Idea of Systems as Applied to Looking at Change in a School

A systems approach can be useful in application to a variety of aspects of school life. For example: individuals, groups of individuals, and also the whole school can each usefully be regarded as a system.

### Development in My Thinking

#### Metaphysics and systems theory: functioning can be hard to change

My thinking about what happens has, it seems, improved since my introduction to metaphysics and systems theory; these two areas of thought have helped me understand why individuals' thinking, and individuals' and systems' functioning are much harder to change than I had previously thought.

### Systems theory

Of fundamental significance as regards the long term behaviour patterns of individuals and larger systems is the notion of feedback and control, i.e. the idea of what keeps a particular system in a particular state of stable flow.

### Paradoxes

Paying attention to paradoxes can provide mind opening stimuli to thought; for me Watzlawick's idea of pragmatic paradox has useful applications to human interacting.

### The theory of logical types

In my perception, Bertrand Russell's theory of logical types has useful applications to thought: for example, it illuminates the utility of being aware of different levels of functioning within a system at any one given time.

### Time

A notion that each individual has a particular and peculiar range of different personal 'clocks' and hence a range of personal time, has been useful in dealing with a variety of individuals.

### Mind and matter

A notion of mind as an open information system, combined with an awareness of Collingwood's idea of suppositions, has been useful in understanding and interacting with other minds.

### History and Ethos of the School

The founding headmaster intended the school to be less authoritarian than more traditional preparatory schools. Staff who stayed for long periods adopted ways of being which were in sympathy with the school's ethos. (For example, the new headmaster of 1983 was said, by a member of staff from his previous school who joined in 1985, to have changed in behaviour since joining us to such an extent that he was almost unrecognisable.) Consequently, many of the characteristics - especially those relating to discipline, academic standards, and a generally low level of competitiveness amongst the children - have remained much the same during my acquaintance with the school, though the headmaster and all the staff but one have changed;

this may be at first sight all the more surprising considering that the new headmaster of 1983 expressed his intention to improve discipline and academic standards, and to raise the children's competitiveness at games particularly.

While I have known the school, it has grown from 120, boys only, to around 140 boys and 60 girls. During this time the organisation - I am considering the arrangements for academic work and discipline in particular, but the point applies generally - has evolved in small stages without there having been any new formal structure imposed upon it.

I suggest some of the concerns about discipline and academic standards could be alleviated with organisation which provided systematised monitoring and regulation of those two systems.

I suggest many of the problems encountered by the new headmaster of 1983 could have been less severe if the school had had more formal organisation of the types I have proposed for the academic work, and for the discipline in the 1991 initiative.

### Issues and Experiences

#### **Overview**

#### Troubled times

I think that during the troubled times of 1983, '84 and '85, as staff representative I achieved little in the way of alleviating problems which arose from the general rejection of the new regime. In most cases the headmaster did not seem to want to know of what I had to tell him. However, I think that the development of the Art and CDT was facilitated to a large extent by

some of my colleagues' and my, involvement as mediators between the art teacher and the headmaster who found it hard to talk to each other.

### Staff representation

Staff representation on the development committee and the now defunct curriculum committee did not significantly increase the staff input in to policy making. This was because the headmasters and governors continued to make decisions, on matters which were the business of the committees, outside the committees if it suited them. The same applied to the two meetings of staff and governors: one to discuss the future of the school, and the other finance. The lack of power of the staff stems from the fact that there is no clear organisation of procedure which involves staff, and gives them powers such as voting rights at meetings.

Though staff would like more official power in determining policy, all attempts to obtain it have been rejected by headmaster and governors.

### Departments need to be organised

The curriculum committee was an example of an idea produced by members of staff in order to try to facilitate better organisation of the curriculum. A need seemed to exist only because there were no other formal systems such as organised departments and departmental co-operation. The National Curriculum is now seen by the headmasters as prescribing what to teach, but, in my view, the departments still need to be organised internally, and externally as regards fitting into the overall scheme, for policy to be implemented cohesively.

### Organisation and Standardisation of Metaphysics

Certain forms of organisation can go some way towards standardising metaphysics and rendering a degree of communal metaphysics within a system, obviating the need for some non-standard personal metaphysics. For example, many teachers when new to our school have commented that they found it hard to know what to teach and what standards to expect from the children because there was no system of co-ordinated syllabi and related assessment throughout the school. As a result, these teachers have had to rely to a great extent on their personal expectations of the children, which tend to be affected by their experience with the children, and hence by the ethos of the school.

Related to the ideas of ethos and the adoption of ways of being by incoming staff is the following fact. At the school there are long standing members of staff who are heads of departments who are well organised personally, and recognise that the school lacks organisation, but do little to organise their own departments. They are not encouraged by the headmaster to do more. One of them, who has complained to me that the school's organisation is entirely laissez faire, runs a department which is in my view almost entirely laissez faire itself.

This seems to be related to my earlier point, under the History and ethos of the school, that ways of being are adopted by incoming members of staff. If I ask myself how I am affected by this, I suggest that I am, very much so, in that my functioning is affected, but, perhaps as the result of my enquiry, I am able to some extent to think outside and around my being and functioning in the school. As a result, I now feel equipped to re-organise myself and my own functioning

and also offer suggestions for re-organisation within the school as in the 1991 initiative on discipline.

Seminal discussion regarding developments and improvement in practice

I still feel seminary meetings would be beneficial - perhaps the absence of intra and inter departmental co-operation makes for a greater apparent need. It seems there are several good ideas at large but there is no one at the top of the organisation with the initiative and ability to facilitate means of considering their implementation. Because there were considerable troubles early in the new (1983) headmaster's regime, meetings became focuses for conflict, and so they were suppressed somewhat. Hence, with the arrival of this headmaster, the staff were confronted by much more suppression of information and discussion; this they took some time to begin to tolerate; I suggest the school is the poorer as a result.

1985 Papers on development

I now feel that in my papers on development, of 1985, I showed too great a concern about a need to instigate change pre-emptively. At the time I was concerned that the previous headmaster who had been an "ideas man" had left a gap which had not been filled. (In retrospect it seems it would have been more beneficial if I had given more attention to improvements in organisation, with a view to improving standards generally.) However, the subsequent emergence of the National Curriculum, which is being adopted by the school, has provided a source of ideas for curriculum development, thus obviating the need, as far as the headmasters are concerned, for anyone else to propose innovative change.

### Troubled period, 1983 to 1986

Throughout the troubled period, from 1983 to 1986 approximately, there seemed a need not only to protest against the new headmaster's handling of issues but also, simultaneously, one to establish discourse with him; not surprisingly these two things were largely incompatible.

#### A lack of relevant experience for potential headmistresses and headmasters

I suggest that the governors and headmasters' tendency to withhold information and to avoid involving senior staff in policy making, and also the lack of departmental organisation, mean that potential headmasters and headmistresses amongst the staff do not get sufficient opportunities for relevant experience.

#### Support for protest

During the troubled times, though there were always many passive objectors, it was never possible to muster much active support for protest when it came to the crunch.

#### Evangelical Issue

1. This was an example of, in retrospect, a relatively unskilful attempt on my part to combine protest with the initiation of discourse between two groups with differing suppositional states.
2. The issue provides some evidence of a tendency amongst influential members of the establishment of the school to seek to retain overall control within an exclusive group, but also to resist being drawn into deep discussion with outsiders about the identity of the group.

## Discipline

1. It is now not my view that children who come to our school are becoming more difficult to control.
2. We have not managed to get many individual staff to be more open about their particular concerns, difficulties and the particular skills they personally find effective.

### 3. Guidance of new staff

There is still no organised provision for guidance of new staff, though this was agreed in the 1991 initiative; I still think this would be a good idea.

### 4. Reversion of functioning

Though clear, recorded agreement was reached on almost all of the proposals for action, i.e. changes in organisation, in the 1991 initiative, most of the organisation and hence most of the functioning has now reverted to what it was before.

I deliberately did not mention this until half term, Autumn 1991. Then I said to the senior master that though we had agreed to have weekly staff meetings at each of which we would first discuss the children - concerns about discipline in particular - we had not kept to this routine. He said that as things had seemed to be alright, he had not thought it necessary to have the weekly discussions. My view was that when running an organisation it was not good to check up on it just when it was going wrong; regular maintenance when things were alright was required; here was a significant difference in suppositions.

### 5. A limit to my power

In light of point 4 above, the discipline issue is an example of an area of general concern for which I

have proposed a range of modifications in organisation. Most of these recommendations were accepted (1991 initiative on discipline). Some were implemented for a while, but more of these became neglected during the first half of the Autumn term 1991, even though most staff thought they should have been maintained. This, to me, exemplifies a limit to my power to effect lasting change in the organisation without my continually prompting the headmaster and senior master to act. In my position I am able to propose modifications in organisation, have them accepted and implemented, but I am not able to change the minds of the headmaster and senior master to such an extent that they maintain the routines without being prompted; arguably I could keep reminding them, but I do not feel inclined to do this.

#### 6. Senior master

Nevertheless, the introduction of the senior master seems to be generally considered to have been a success. This was a modification which led to more permanent change because it entailed an addition of a mind, and hence an addition of a different set of suppositions, to those already organising. The senior master's suppositions led to his imposing extra though, as I have said, in my view not nearly enough co-ordination and organisation: his introduction of a behaviour points system which is much used by many staff.

#### Academic standards

I have taken little action regarding this subject, though I did write a paper for a development committee meeting in January 1988 proposing the idea of deriving and imposing assessment targets, throughout the levels of the school, with the common aim of finishing the Common Entrance syllabus by the end of the fourth year, as opposed to the fifth year as is now the case - there

is at present no organised system of Common Entrance related targets throughout the school. This idea was accepted in principle by the headmaster at the meeting, but no further action was taken. My view now is that we should still consider implementing this proposal, incorporating as far as seems desirable the requirements of the National Curriculum. I suggest that, in order to do this, each department needs to organise its syllabus and a system of half termly assessments to monitor progress. However, I do not feel inclined to suggest this again for the whole school just now, because I feel it would be ignored, partly because so much attention is being given to the National Curriculum. However, I now intend to incorporate my ideas, along with the requirements of the National Curriculum, into my own teaching. I shall offer my ideas to my two colleagues in the department, one of whom is the head of the mathematics department; both already seem distinctly enthusiastic.

Next academic year I shall be better placed to try out my ideas as I shall be able, now that I have the running of the estate better organised, to teach an extra year group at the bottom of the school, giving me a first, second, third, fourth and fifth year group.

#### Controversy over the new pre-prep. department

Our proportion of the day children has increased considerably since opening the pre-prep. References to the size of the pre-prep. are still made by some members of staff even though this clearly makes the headmaster uncomfortable, and, further, quite obviously nothing will be done to curb the size of the pre-prep. under the present headmaster. The intention now in my view, should be to try to capture more of the boarding market, before considering reducing the size of the pre-prep.; this is because it seems that the boarding

market is indeed shrinking - more so because of the 1990/91/92 recession - and, in spite of what I have said in the past, the pre-prep. is probably a lifeline under the circumstances.

### Some Brief Concluding Comments

#### Significant changes which have occurred since the arrival of the new headmaster of 1983

##### **1. Proportion of day children increases**

There has been an increase in the proportion of day children and hence an introduction of more local children and parents. This has resulted in more parental interference which, though in many cases it has concerned trivia, has made life even more difficult for the headmaster because he has not had the confidence and hence the strength to resist it.

##### **2. The system has settled down**

Though there was strong reaction to the new headmaster, from parents and staff in his early years, the system has settled down, and most aspects of the school, in my perception, have remained much the same as before his arrival. The headmaster has not simplified the school or turned it entirely into a day school as was feared by many staff and parents.

##### **3. The range of activities has increased**

The range of activities in the school has increased, and the time spent on any particular one has in most cases decreased. An extra five lessons per week have been introduced to incorporate Craft Design Technology, Computing, Drama and Current Affairs in the timetable; much of this was brought about in response

to the changes in Common Entrance which resulted from the introduction of GCSE and the National Curriculum.

**4. The new headmaster has not suggested any large scale change in organisation**

The new headmaster of 1983 has not suggested any large scale change in the organisation of the whole of, or any aspect of, the school. I regard this as sensible in that it would have been a mistake to introduce organisation which changed the functioning and hence the character of a system which was functioning successfully as a complete whole. However, I believe, as I have already suggested, that there are systems, such as the academic work system, within the overall system which could benefit considerably from improvements in organisation, without detracting from the functioning and character of the overall system. In the case of the academic work system it would be a question of the imposition of some formal organisation throughout the school, there being none at present.

I suggest that behind the lack of organisation in this particular case is a more general supposition that it is not necessary to look at and discuss aspects of functioning when things are apparently satisfactory.

**5. Intransigence of minds**

Throughout my enquiry I have been trying to find ways of changing functioning within the school, from a position of no official power. I have felt inclined to try to affect, and also effect, change because I have had a sense of responsibility for, and loyalty to, the school; this has resulted from my being a long established and senior member of staff who was asked by the staff to be their representative. My lack of power, however, has meant that I have had to try to change

people's minds in order to change their functioning; as a result I have become more aware of intransigence in people's thinking. In suggesting change I have run into a difficulty of being ignored if too subtle, and being resented if too persuasive.

I conclude that I have not resolved my difficulties in changing the thinking of others. However, I do claim to have become aware of some of the reasons why minds are difficult to change: examples include the stability of suppositional states and the phenomenon of what Paul Watzlawick would call complementary schismogenesis, which can occur when opposing ideas are forcefully proposed.

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Where Now?

In the introduction I said it was unlikely that this enquiry would finish in my lifetime. I still consider it to be open ended. Hence it seems reasonable to consider briefly how I see it developing in the immediate future.

Academic Work

During the Summer Term of 1992 an independent school's promotions consultant recommended that the school should try to attract more parents who wanted to send their children to the more academic public schools such as Eton, Radley, Marlborough and Charterhouse; behind this idea was the intention of attracting more boy boarders.

The current recession combined with an established trend away from boarding was having some effect on the school, as it was on most similar schools. The boarding market was contracting: in 1987 member schools of the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools had had 21, 574 full boarders whereas in 1992 they had had 16, 836.

New head of mathematics

Our new head of mathematics who took over on the retirement, in August 1992, of his predecessor who was not to be replaced, had been and still is a member of the school's promotion committee which discussed the consultant's report. Since joining the school five years ago he has shown himself particularly keen to improve the school's academic image, very much as I have. The retirement of his predecessor has allowed us con

siderable new freedom to try to implement what are apparently mutually desired changes. He has read my chapter on academic standards, and feels, as I do, that if my outline proposals had been acted upon in 1988, then the consultant's comments about our academic image might have had less justification. He also feels that, in general, the gist of my predictions regarding the effects of the pre-prep. have been born out.

Hence the new head of mathematics latched on to the consultant's recommendations as justification for rallying other heads of department, some of whom were also members of the promotions committee, to try to draw up proposals for improving the school's academic image. He consequently arranged two informal meetings with the intention of drawing up some proposals for changes in policy to be discussed in detail with the headmaster and assistant headmaster.

#### Informal meetings

The informal meetings were attended by the heads of the English, French, mathematics and science departments. Though I am none of these, by request I chaired and recorded both discussions. As can be seen from my account below, the meetings covered not only general topics relevant to the tone and image of the school, but also topics more specific to particular departments.

Some recommendations and Declarations of Intentions  
Which Emerged in an Unofficial Meeting of the Heads of  
the French, Maths and Science departments on 10th July,  
1992

**Introduction: an earlier meeting**

Earlier in the term the heads of the English, French and Maths departments had met informally to discuss a common interest in erasing a non-academic image which seemed to be perceived to a significant extent. Points which arose included the following:-

- i) the headmaster was keen to improve the academic image of the school;
- ii) an independent consultant had recently suggested we should appear to be more academic;
- iii) the school was committed to adopting the National Curriculum, but it needed to be seen to be achieving even higher standards - an increasing number of a "new type" of day parent, combined with the fact that some state schools were opting out, meant the school would experience greater competition from state schools: the pre-prep. open day had provided evidence that this might be the case;
- iv) the junior school was becoming organised for the National Curriculum, so perhaps the senior school now required more co-ordination - should there be meetings of heads of departments about this? Was there a need for a head of the senior school?
- v) fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum was going to require more teaching time, more time for assessment of pupils

individually, and more time for documentation:

- vi) the head of the science departments was thought to share the common interest and so would be invited to a meeting to take place at the beginning of the summer holidays; unfortunately the head of English would then be away.

#### The meeting on 10th July 1992

At the meeting the points which were made included the following:-

- i) the "new type" of parent would be able to get mixed ability teaching and the National Curriculum in a state school; they would be looking for greater academic achievement with us;
- ii) a holiday attitude had persisted in some children since the school exams;
- iii) in 1991 there had been two teaching weeks after the exams; and in 1992 there had been three;
- iv) in summer term 1990 we taught 8 out of 10½ weeks, in summer '91, 8 out of 11 weeks, and in summer '92, 8 out of 10½ weeks; 10 days were normally devoted to expeditions at the end of each summer term but we were beginning to lose an appreciable amount of more time to other extra activities before exams.

It was agreed that the following recommendations should be made with a view to discussing them with the headmaster and assistant headmaster before the beginning of the Autumn term 1992.

- 1.i) school exams should take place at the beginning of the week immediately preceding expeditions: this in order that there could be no teaching time disrupted by extra activities which might seem justifiably fitted in after exams, but not before:
- ii) hence senior leavers would have to stick to the normal timetable after Common Entrance, though they might pursue projects with their subject teachers; and
- iii) the first few days of the summer holidays would have to be made available for finishing and correcting reports: staff would therefore have to be in school at this time; and
- iv) geography projects (4th year, for Common Entrance the following year) would have to be done in geography lessons, but perhaps some preps. could be given over to these to provide some extra time.

2. Already more time was needed to do children's individual assessments in science. The head of science would from now on need one games period (or equivalent) per week free for this; he would have to take children individually out of games: each child would have to miss a games period (or its equivalent) per term. The head of English probably needed a similar allotment of time: the head of French and the mathematicians did not need this yet, but soon would do so in order to comply with the requirements of the National Curriculum.
3. The head of English would probably also need to use one hobby period per week for English.
4. As the pressure of academic work would have to increase throughout the school, the 4th year

should now be allowed to keep one hobby period per week free for catching up, just as the 5th year have been allowed to do hitherto.

5. The timetables for lessons and games should be adhered to meticulously, with as little deviation as possible: This should contribute to a greater sense of discipline and order; deviations from timetables have at times, particularly as regards games, led to a sense of disorganisation and even chaos.
6. The French, Maths and Science departments would give weekly grades for effort and attainment as well as the graded already given at the established intervals of approximately three weeks.

#### **Intention**

In order that more children might achieve passes to the more academic public schools - this in response to one of the independent consultant's suggestions - the French department aimed to finish the Common Entrance syllabus by the end of the Spring term in the 5th year; the Maths department was aiming to finish it by the end of the 4th year; and the Science department was intending to advance target dates for covering topics at the junior end of the school in order to cover more of the syllabus or, ideally, even allow time for revision.

#### **My Private Comments on These Meetings**

The clear conclusion of the meetings seemed to be that we should aim to be seen to be improving academic standards for two reasons. First we accepted the recommendation of the consultant. (What he had said I

had recommended in my paper in 1988, and the idea had first been agreed in a curriculum committee meeting, at my instigation, in 1986)

Secondly we felt that if our proportion of day children increased in spite of our efforts to attract more boarders, we might have a larger proportion of children of parents who were marginally committed to private education; if more state schools opted out, so competition from state schools might increase, and hence we should need to show we were delivering the National Curriculum and considerably more.

The Maths department was able to say that during the summer holidays we would be working on a new scheme which would incorporate the requirements of Common Entrance and National Curriculum - the two syllabuses are growing closer together - and at the same time to reach targets earlier than in the past, with the intention that more children would reach a higher standard by the time they came to take Common Entrance. My present agreed task is to establish termly syllabuses for each year group, orders of priorities as regards sequences of covering topics, and progress tests and examinations. Hence I now have an opportunity to put some of my earlier thinking into practice.

It seems to me that we in the private sector are in a very fortunate position as regards the National Curriculum. We are not obliged to adopt it, and, if we do institute it, we can still improvise as regards the testing and record keeping. I suggest it is up to us to find imaginative ways of implementing the syllabuses while at the same time finding economical, but sensible and useful, ways of testing and record keeping.

### The subsequent meeting with the headmaster and assistant headmaster

My account of the informal meetings was circulated, unfortunately after the beginning of the autumn term 1992, to the headmaster and assistant headmaster and also to the heads of the History and Geography departments and the head of the junior school. A meeting of these people and the original group was held on October 14th 1992 at 7.00p.m.

The headmaster began the meeting by mildly rebuking those who had held the preliminary meetings for doing so without his prior knowledge; there seemed to be misunderstanding because those concerned who were also members of the promotions committee felt the headmaster had asked them to pursue their ideas in such meetings. The headmaster also complained that all the heads of departments affected by the National Curriculum had not been included; the instigating group felt that it was the subjects which were considered to be academic, and on which the children passed or failed their entrance exams., which contributed to our academic image. Apparently it was also tacitly felt that had the headmaster wanted others present, he could have said so earlier - he had had plenty of notice.

The rest of the meeting was more constructive as regards particular points. For example: it was agreed that time should be made available for individual assessments, and school exams in the summer term, 1993, were deferred for a week in a compromise which enabled reports still to be completed before the end of that term; it was also agreed that subject teachers could give weekly grades for effort. The headmaster closed by saying the meeting had been very useful.

No new measures directed at improving the academic image specifically: an important hidden conclusion

I include this information here, in my final remarks, because what transpired provided me with the opportunity of confirming, together with my new head of department who is ten years younger than me and who has been teaching at the school for only five years, an important conclusion.

That conclusion was confirmed as follows. After the headmaster had delivered his mild rebuke, he went through the points in my account. When he came to point (iv) under "Introduction: an earlier meeting", he asked those present if they wanted meetings of heads of departments to discuss policy on academic work. This, I suggest, was clearly the wrong way round. If it was the intention that the children were actually to achieve more, then it was up to the headmaster to impose greater expectations on his heads of departments, asking them regularly what standards the children were achieving, and how these standards were known. One or two of the heads of departments replied that it would be nice to meet from time to time; no one suggested what the headmaster might impose. I remained silent as I was not a head of department: just an interested observer.

This exchange confirmed for me, once again, that the headmaster and the others present lacked the suppositional states required to share closely enough my view of how standards might be raised. This was further confirmed when the idea of a head of the senior school was rejected. I had suggested this idea at the informal meetings, explaining that it would probably be necessary for someone other than the headmaster to make it their business to maintain the necessary tension to keep minds focused on improving and improved standards.

This was because the headmaster had shown in the past that, first, he did not hold the necessary suppositional states to see how standards might be raised, and, secondly, he was not good at maintaining new monitoring procedures which were based upon other people's ideas which he did not really appreciate: this had been particularly evident after the 1991 initiative on discipline.

#### After the meeting

After the meeting the head of mathematics and I privately came rapidly to the conclusion that we would henceforth confine our attentions to improving standards of mathematics while hoping to influence other departments by example. I like to think that with my experience of trying to change, from a position of little official power, general aspects of the school which are out of my control - issues concerning evangelicalism, discipline, academic standards, and the pre-prep. are examples - I have helped a like thinking younger colleague avoid wasting much energy trying similarly to change that which is outside his direct control. This seems to be some justification for my having, at such length, recounted and examined what has happened and what I have tried to do.

#### Philosophy

##### An introductory course

As regards philosophy, my intention is to try to devise an introductory course for the children in the 4th and 5th year groups (twelve and thirteen year olds) at school.

During the past year I have been invited to conduct three sessions as contributions to courses in Per-

sonal, Social and Health Education. Some of the topics in this course centre around the idea of conflict in human interaction. In my offerings, which I emphasised were based on personal research, I tried to show - by drawing it out from the children where possible - how it seemed to me that conflict arose for, among others, the following reasons.

1. Our experiences are inevitably different.
2. Our perceptions seem to differ; e.g. some people can see hidden figures in pictures straight away, while others see them eventually, and yet others can never see them even when shown.
3. Perceiving seems to be active. E.g. there is a well known example of a particular drawn representation of an open staircase which can appear not only three dimensional, but also the same way up as before when turned upside down.
4. We occupy different positions at different times, hence two of us can see the same thing happen but not from the same position.
5. Relativity as regards position (as in 4.), time, and motion is significant .
6. My mind seems to be confronted with different sorts of knowledge including thoughts, ideas, beliefs, opinions and facts, all of which can engender questions within my mind, or between my mind and those of others.
7. I am bombarded by much information in the form of language which has the potential for deception for many different reasons; some examples follow.

- ii) Different people use the same words differently.
- iii) Language enables me to consider certain aspects of contexts, outside of those contexts. E.g. language enables me to move from actuality to theory or fantasy, and back again, almost - if not entirely - without noticing it.
- iv) Words like "all" or "everyone" can imply that all of a context has been considered when in fact that is far from the case.
- v) The use of the definite article "the" can imply that something is unique when it is not, e.g. some books have titles which imply that they are exhaustive e.g. "The Problems of Philosophy", or "The Central Questions of Philosophy".
- vi) With language we are able to refer to situations as though time had stopped.
- vii) Individually held erroneous suppositions can lead to confusion. E.g. someone I know often says that she keeps hearing that inflation has fallen, but she sees no evidence that prices have fallen.
- viii) Communally held suppositions can also be misleading. E.g. there seems to be a communally held supposition that each individual's intelligence is fixed and can be known in relation to the intelligences of other individuals.

#### Suppositions and categories of questions

As exercises we tried to identify some of the suppositions implied in a variety of questions, and we tried to categorise different sorts of questions as to whether they were either one of, or a mixture of, the

following types.

1. Questions of fact.
2. Questions of logic.
3. Questions of opinion.
4. Closed questions: questions which suggest the answers, e.g. "Do you intend to vote Labour or Conservative at the next election?"
5. Questions with built in assumptions, e.g. "Have you stopped beating your wife?"
6. Questions with built in unanswerability.
7. Verbal questions: questions about how certain words are used.

### Paradox

We also looked at some paradoxes: logico-mathematical, semantic and pragmatic. We looked at how language could produce self contradictory statements, how misunderstandings could arise through erroneous suppositions, and we considered how each one of us, from time to time, was probably subjected to double bind as a result of paradoxical injunctions which might in some cases ostensibly be questions.

### Important principles

I tried to get across what, in my view, are some important principles regarding conflict, which, if grasped, I suggest can make conflict a bit easier to handle.

I consider the most important of these is the idea that completely objective reality is inaccessible to any individual human being, but our language, personal and communal, can, and often does, imply suppositions that objective reality is accessible to any one in-

dividual.

Further, our language can imply suppositions of concrete absoluteness in regard to abstract concepts. For example, moral assertions in many cases depend upon generalised abstract concepts; hence they perhaps can be made legitimately only with explicit qualification by those principles. Moral assertions often omit specific qualification; questions about them could be asked as to whether their qualification were Christian morality, and, if so, what branch of Christian morality.

Lastly, I suggest that it is crucially important in an introduction to philosophy to be clear that there is a difference between problems which arise in the practical world and those which arise in philosophy itself, the latter being almost inevitably dependent on the means - language or system of symbols - by which they are represented. Philosophy can be of use in trying to resolve problems of the practical world - particularly those which arise out of language -, but it is important to remember that recourse to philosophy is recourse to a metastate as regards practicality. Hence, problems which do not exist in the practical world can, nevertheless, arise in philosophy because philosophy is capable of achieving metastates not only about the practical world but also about itself. I suggest that Russell's paradox, which I discuss briefly on pages 155-160, is an example of a problem which arises in philosophy but not, in it's stated form, in the practical world. However, though this paradox arose in philosophy and mathematics, it nevertheless gave rise to Russell's theory of logical types which has been shown to have been of use in application to practicalities: e.g. Gregory Bateson's and Paul Watzlawick's considerable use in application to psychotherapy.

## Enthusiastic Responses: Motivation to Develop

These sessions received an enthusiastic response from some of the children, and particularly encouraging interest was shown by the teachers who had invited me to contribute and who had themselves joined in the discussions. Hence I am very keen to extend and improve this work; I see it as a way of developing my own philosophy while at the same time offering something to others. I was nowhere near this state when I began this enquiry.

I was then in a state in which I was inclined to be critical of the thinking of others around me, but not so much critical of my own thinking. R.G. Collingwood's Essay on Metaphysics, and the teaching of Mr. Brookes helped me to try to focus on some of the metaphysics, in Collingwood's sense, in conflicting ideas and, hence, some of the metaphysics in my own thinking. This combined with systems theory - that of P. Watzlawick and Mr. Brookes particularly - has helped me feel more open and hence freer and more confident.

My feeling of greater openness carries with it greater awareness of my past and, hence probable present closure; thus it seems to have set up a useful self-perpetuating flow (with positive feedback through greater openness, to greater awareness of my own closure, and thence - I hope - on to a state of even greater openness). I now seek not only to continue this process for myself, but also to try to facilitate it for others.

What I perceive as my freedom to think seems to be self enhancing just as my previous closure now seems to have been self enhancing. I believe Jean-Paul Sartre wrote or said somewhere that the only freedom we do not have is the freedom not to be free: this seems an idea

to perpetuate.

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