APPENDIX 3: DIARY TEXTS

3.1 D1

1: 12 June
2: There has been some friction today between management and teachers
3: about the selection of video materials. Management is concerned that
4: teachers do not pay enough attention to commercial concerns in their
5: choice of materials - e.g. one teacher recently showed a video of a 60
6: Minutes segment stating that Australian education was much inferior to
7: that of Taiwan. There has also been some attempt on the part of
8: management to stop teachers from using material on Pauline Hanson, as
9: they feel that reporting of her pronouncements has already done some
10: commercial damage. Teachers feel that management should not interfere
11: in their selection of materials. It seems to me that teachers rarely
12: choose material because it offers a good example of some particular
13: type of language. They are more likely to choose it because they feel
14: it may stimulate discussion, or because they are personally interested
15: in it. I think it is interesting that when I pointed out to
16: management that they themselves were still using a placement test that
17: vilified Aeroflot, someone said that they hadn't had time to replace
18: it. (It stemmed from a time when we never had Russian students.)
19:
20: I have been filling in for people on holiday until the new term
21: starts, so I've had the chance to see some classes that I don't
22: usually get to see. I've been teaching an 'intermediate' business
23: class for a week now. The school obviously wants to offer 'business
24: English' to anyone who asks for it, and probably some parents pressure
25: their children to take it. In fact, it's a bit of a farce. A lot of
26: the students are really elementary, but as there aren't any textbooks
27: for elementary business English, the lowest class is simply called
28: 'intermediate' and forced to use an intermediate book. It is way above
29: the heads of about half the class.
30:
31: Students in this class are required to do a 20 minute presentation in
32: order to graduate with a certificate in business English. From what
33: I've seen of the drafts, they would seem more likely to take 5 minutes
34: rather than 20, but I've been told that everyone must pass.
35:
36: This is part of a general problem, which is that most classes tend to
37: be over-rated - we often, for example, have intermediate classes which
38: are really elementary. There is a kind of conspiracy that when ASLPR
39: ratings are handed out they must fall within a bandwidth that has been
40: established as acceptable for each class level. Teachers who stray
41: outside this are asked to change their assessments, or simply have it
42: done for them by their supervisors. Most teachers just accept this.
43: New teachers find it puzzling, but soon realise that there is nothing
44: they can do about it.
45:
46: 13 June
47: This week students have been given forms on which to assess their
48: classes, teachers, etc. Only half the classes get them each time, and
49: none of mine did this time. It is interesting to observe the attitude
50: of teachers to these. Some say they don't want to look and others rush
51: to see if they got good reviews. Many teachers feel that they should
52: not be assessed or observed at all, so it is clear that they don't
53: view the process as one of providing a service to a customer.
54:
55: 17 June
56: Last Friday's presentations were as I had feared they would be. The
57: worse students knew themselves that they hadn't done well, as they
58: refused to look at the video of their presentations, but sat with
59: their eyes cast down. I dutifully marked them all up. The range, which
60: was actually about 1-5 was upgraded to 6.5 - 8. Some teachers justify
61: this on the grounds that the truth would be too discouraging, and the
62: students would no try any more (not that they are trying too hard
63: now).
64:
65:
66: 20 June
67: Something interesting happened to day with regard to the selection of
68: video material. I prepared a memo to be circulated to staff on the
69: condition that it was not attributed to me - I did this for the Head
70: Teacher, for whom I feel sorry because she is besieged from both sides
71: and has no-one to have a cup of tea with. Anyway, she told me that the
72: memo was to be circulated by management, but that they had decided to
73: delete one paragraph. This was one which indicated that we were
74: currently experiencing a downturn in business, mentioned in connection
75: with the inadvisability of bad-mouthing Australian education to those
76: who were in the process of buying some of it.
77:
78: I thought this was particularly interesting as it revealed the fact
79: that management is aware of the tension between the teachers'
80: perception of their role and their view of management with its eye on
81: the bottom line. This might seem obvious, but sometimes it becomes
82: obscured in our institution where there is such verbal stress put on
83: quality control.
84:
85: I believe that a management person even said: "We should take that out
86: - we don't want them to think that we only care about the bottom
87: line." Of course, that is precisely the case. I feel that there is
88: little possibility that they are motivated by - say - a desire to
89: further international relations. It is rather charming, though, like a
90: fox pretending to be a chicken with the aid of a few glued-on
91: feathers and as cardboard beak. I suppose I find it charming because
92: it is so little likely to fool anyone.
93:
94: On another topic - I was glad to see the end of my 'fill-in' class
95: today. Poor souls, it is hard for elementary students to be dragged
96: through the briar bush of Business Objectives. This is one of the
97: worst examples I have seen of the phenomenon of the class which has to
98: be treated as if its members were at a much higher level than they
99: actually are. When it gets this extreme it seems obvious to me that it
100: must be counterproductive even from the commercial point of view.
101: However much the material is simplified, it still remains beyond most
102: of them, and they feel cowed and beaten by it.
103:
104: It should certainly be possible to write a business course for
105: elementary students which used business vocabulary and business
106: contexts. But there would be little incentive for the school to do it
as the number of students is so low. These students strongly resisted the advice I gave them, and which I am sure they have also received from others, to go into a General English stream. They thus connive at their own misery.

June 22

re low level business students mentioned in the last entry. Their only hope would be to strike a teacher so dedicated that he/she would spend a lot of their free time writing a course. This is very unlikely to happen as most of the teachers are so inexperienced that they don't realise that there is anything wrong. Of course, that is a commercial decision too. No school could afford to have a majority of very experienced teachers. But I wonder if the balance isn't a bit too far the other way in our case. And of course there is the strange phenomenon that the more experienced the teacher, the less likely they are to actually teach. For nine staff members who might be regarded as senior - they have an MA or RSA Diploma, or have just been teaching for a long time -- the average weekly workload in the classroom is one and a half days. There are four who do not teach at all.

While often telling people how important teaching standards are, most of these people would rather have their wisdom teeth drawn than go into the classroom. Since management is happy to countenance this, it must mean that they believe that these people contribute more to the well-being of the company by not teaching.

Not teaching is a sign of status, and sometimes you here people say 'only a teacher'. When you look at the less-experienced and therefore cheaper teachers that are hired, there are certain characteristics that emerge. These teachers tend, for example, to be younger and better-looking than the run of the population. I would guess at a mean age of approximately 26. None of them have any visible physical defect, or are overweight. Very few of them even wear glasses. None are of Asian racial origin. This reminds me of the ads I used to see in the Japan Times for 'young, blond female English teacher, attractive and under 28'. Having seen groups of teachers from AMES, TAFE or even some other private schools, it does not seem to me that the characteristics predominating here reflect the mix of teachers as a whole. Schools associated with universities seem to have a more representative mix but it may be that being associated with a university is a strong enough selling point in itself without the need to focus on other points, including this, the 'school as sexual shop window' factor.

In our school, the few teachers who are older invariably teach on migrant classes - I am the only exception - and in those classes the salesmanship element is not present. Management would be quick to condemn the Japan Times type of advertising, but I think that they must be selecting with similar characteristics themselves. They would be loathe to admit it, but they know that, for example, Japanese girl students often swoon over handsome young male teachers, and that this factor would affect their assessments of the school.

As far as teaching standards are concerned, there is little interest in them until there is a complaint, and then there is a great deal of
scuttling about and allocation of blame. This happened the other day when a very inexperienced teacher was rostered to teach an elective class on English and Tourism (General English students have these electives one day a week - such things as IELTS Preparation, or Australian Studies or Drama), and students complained about the number of excursions she took them on. She had not been given any course outline for the elective and was not capable of organising one for herself. Nor should she have been expected to be. She had simply been thrown in. No-one considered the matter until the complaint was made, and then she was blamed because she could not swim.

Of course, we do now have a consultant two days a week who manages a staff development program. This is one of the saving graces. If we were talking about management motivation, though, I think that her appointment has something to do with the perennial question that sales and promotion people get asked by overseas agents: 'What is the difference between your school and the cheaper ones?' The presence of the consultant has been used extensively in marketing, as has the series of external inservices she is running for teachers from other schools.

June 24

I have been reflecting further on the matter of inexperienced teachers and the mount they teach. I said before, this school employs a big majority of relatively inexperienced teachers, and they do not teach, as I did when I was inexperienced, a limited number of hours. I remember that I started by teaching two days a week and feeling swamped even by that. Now those teachers teach more than any of the experienced teachers (except me, and I am regarded as being eccentric because I still prefer to teach). They tend to teach the full four and a half day week, with perhaps half a day off for some other responsibility they have been given. This time is also often taken up with relief teaching. Being on the bottom of the heap, these teachers have no power to fob this duty off onto anyone else.

These teachers are often confused and exhausted. With a very few exceptions they take their work very seriously, spend hours in preparation, and feel devastated if something 'didn't go well'. For some reason, the experienced teachers' unwillingness to teach is taken as a given, and does not get questioned by the academic management, who, I guess, suffer from the same malaise themselves. Commercial considerations would seem to demand that the clients be served by the most able teachers, but instead they are served by the cheapest.

So management on the teaching side place the maintenance of their own status above all other considerations, both commercial and educational, and management who have never taught simply place commercial interests first.

Yesterday I was telephoned at home and told that I would not be teaching on General English in the upcoming term, but on EAP. I felt myself curiously unwilling to do this, and, on analysing my feelings, decided that this must be because I do not want to come too close to the nasty picture of what is happening to Australian education.
I have seen some of the writing produced by students in the EAP stream, examples which have been regarded as good, and I thought they were terrible. I feel that students wishing to enter university in any discipline should have to pass HSC English (I find IELTS a very poor substitute), but I know this would reduce the numbers to almost zero. I know that there is enormous pressure on academics to pass all full-fee-paying students, and I have personally heard parents in Taiwan say of their offspring who have failed to gain a place in a university there: "Never mind, we'll send him/her to Australia."

Sorry if I seem to be wandering off the point. But there is a connection, because EAP is the first step on the escalator of lies, I think. I know it's there, but I'd prefer to avoid dealing with it personally. This marketing of Australian education is becoming such a big industry now that it's scary. I asked the teacher who is in charge of the EAP program what has happened to the system which was devised with one of the universities whereby our students could bypass the IELTS exam by completing a written assignment and gaining a certain mark on our placement test. He said that no-one had entered university by this method recently, but that it was still used as a marketing point.

The memo that I mentioned earlier on selection of materials was distributed today. I was in a uniquely advantageous situation to get feedback on it, since no-one knew I had written it. I must say that I was surprised at the vehemence of the opposition to it. A lot of people regarded it as censorship; since it asked them to take various factors into account when they choose material rather than asking them not to use anything in particular, I don't think that that was reasonable comment. Others wanted to react by taking everything to extremes - coming up with absurd suggestions about what they would have to avoid if they didn't want to offend anyone.

One person raised the matter of whaling and the Japanese - she said that Japanese should be told that this was wrong and that she saw nothing wrong with telling them. I said that if she felt this way, the best thing she could do would be to write to the Japanese Embassy, or to join some suitable organisation, rather than using her classroom as a pulpit - I said it a bit more tactfully than that - but I don't think she agreed.

One of the teachers who works with migrant classes took extreme offence at the description of the school as a business which was selling a product. I know him, and he is a nice boy who is dedicated to his work, and who has been making intelligent efforts to sell migrant classes to the ethnic community. He has, for example, been to visit the Islamic Council and a Jewish organisation and some other groups, trying to get ready for the withdrawal of the CES from its role of provider of education services. He should therefore be aware of the fact that money changes hands, but he was very upset. He seemed to equate the word 'product' with something inherently shonky. But then he is very left-wing.

From my point of view, the memo said, in essence try not to offend
272: people don't use materials which say that Australian education is 
273: useless think before you give Pauline Hanson too much publicity. This 
274: does not seem too radical to me. (I did, though, try to make the memo 
275: a little stronger than just a suggestion.) I think that the reason 
276: must be that the teachers are so anti-management that any edict issued 
277: will be regarded with deep suspicion and automatically regarded as 
278: anti-teacher. This is a decision which management have brought upon 
279: themselves.

280: There is also the point that teachers do not have very much power, and 
281: so perhaps they are determined to protect the last bastion of their 
282: freedom, the freedom to choose materials. Perhaps they can also gain 
283: some pleasure and some sense of power and worth if they can harangue 
284: the class about whatever it is that they are personally on about. I 
285: have felt this myself, but I recognise it for what it is. I believe 
286: there is also an element of punishment and revenge in the desire to 
287: tell the customers, who are sometimes far from fun, that their eating 
288: habits are disgusting and their politics suspect.

289: Some people mistake their role entirely, and see themselves as 
290: something else. I remember a teacher years ago who went into the 
291: classroom and gave a lesson on avoiding AIDS which included unrolling 
292: condoms onto her fingers. Lessons may also serve as therapy - for 
293: example the teacher whose lover was dying of AIDS who gave lesson 
294: after lesson on the disease. So we have teaching as social work and 
295: teaching as therapy for the teacher.

296: I think ESL teaching is a kind of refuge for the desperate and 
297: battered, and this adds to the variety of strange ways in which 
298: teachers see themselves. Certainly, language rarely seems to come to 
299: the foreground. The majority of teachers at my organisation have 
300: little interest in language and see nothing strange in the fact that 
301: they cannot spell fairly simple words or explain basic grammar points.

302: I am due to give a major inservice in a couple of days on the topic 
303: of cultural sensitivity, so we will see how it goes - I expect there 
304: will be controversy, so that will be something to look forward to.

305: All in all, there seemed to be little realisation that we are 
306: providing a service to a customer. One man said that this was a new 
307: concept for him and he was happy with it, and felt that it made him 
308: more secure, because he could realise clearly what was the nature of 
309: his work. Such pragmatism is rare. Inexperienced teachers who have 
310: done a short course in one method of language teaching cannot be 
311: of a service.

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314: concept for him and he was happy with it, and felt that it made him 
315: more secure, because he could realise clearly what was the nature of 
316: his work. Such pragmatism is rare. Inexperienced teachers who have 
317: done a short course in one method of language teaching cannot be 
318: expected, of course, to be very flexible in their approach.
The most recent of my musings have made me realise that we are not simply looking at a situation where management espouses commercial considerations and teachers espouse pedagogical ones, with the former being the black hats and the latter the white ones. There is considerable variety among the teachers when it comes to recognising exactly what they do. The role of the teacher may be perceived in many different ways. There is also the division between that part of management which is concerned with status and the part whose principal concern is profit.

I remembered this morning (this is not strictly related to my last remark) the case of a teacher in an off-shore branch whose students said they all hated pair/group work. They did not want to do it, they said, because the reason they had paid for the course was to speak to the teacher. Despite of explanations of the benefits, they refused to budge. Sydney top management's attitude was "Stop all pair/group work immediately"; lower level management (themselves ex-teachers and products of the communicative method era) said "Let's think up new ways to get them to accept it"; the teacher said "they must be forced to accept it or there is no way they can be taught". Of course, these were not ELICOS students as they were in an EFL situation, but it illustrates well the way that teachers and management think.

JULY 5
Not so much news for the diary this week. I've been teaching elementary classes - something I haven't done for ages. There's not much in the way of materials. Some of the teachers who usually teach at that level have asked management for money to buy more, but their request was refused. Management then made a half-hearted attempt to get teachers to comply with the existing requirement that they should add a lesson to the file once a month. Teachers don't do it, and when they do, the stuff is pretty rubbishy anyway. Most of them have little experience and little time, and can't be expected to produce creative 'fun' lessons that people would be keen to use. There are no videos for this level at all, and very few skills materials.

Management are also trying at the moment to get the 'best' out of their investment in the professional development consultant by threatening the teachers with penalties if they do not attend the sessions. Some of the teachers are up in arms and are boycotting the sessions for this reason. The trainer is also very unhappy about it as she took the work on the understanding that attendance would be voluntary.

JULY 7
I was thinking today that if I were asked to choose the most common area of conflict between pedagogical and financial concerns in this school it would be the placement of students in classes. It is almost impossible to demote a student, even if they have been seriously misplaced in the first instance, and the labels on the classes have
very little to do with the students in them. Most 'advanced' students are in fact intermediate, and some of them are closer to pre-intermediate. Only the lowest levels are accurately.
One student had just done six months at X, a school across the road and had reached their intermediate level but her English was more like mild elementary. She wants to do IELTS next month and go to uni next year but she'd be lucky to get a score of 5.0. So I faced the old dilemma of not wanting to discourage her but also not wanting to give her false hopes. She may be one of those people who are hopeless at learning a foreign language. I ascertained that she is aware that it is a very hard exam and she seems to be a person who studies hard, perhaps with bad methods. At least she's not going to be in my class. It may be better to counsel her in a couple of weeks or after she's sat her IELTS test, assuming that she will not reach the proficiency level she will need, to do some course at a business or other college where she can get away from learning English and get into studying something which may be of use to her and through which her English may improve. It's a situation where I think there's not much that can be done at the moment. This is a common situation.
perhaps just thin-skinned. As a general point I felt that I should be
careful to know a student better before making such a comment to them.
It occurred to me that for him it may have been an insulting term
because in Indonesia young guys who go around on the street selling
cigarettes have low status. During lunch I told another teacher about
what had happened because I find that helps when there is any such
problem at work and I got the expression of solidarity which I had
been expecting and hoping for. Just to tell the story/complaint helps
and other teachers have usually experienced something similar and
offer a sympathetic ear. I have had some other quite similar
experiences of students taking things I said the wrong way in the
past. In part they do not recognise that Australians make fun of
someone as a gesture of friendliness. It is easy to forget as a
teacher what an impact our words can have on students, perhaps more so
students from Asian than Western countries. After talking with the
other teacher I did not think of it again until writing this up, so it
wasn't a really serious matter.

Wednesday 12 November 1997
Nothing for today.

Thursday 13 November 1997
[Notes made in the afternoon and typed up on 17 November]
Two students joined the afternoon IELTS class who are not supposed to
be there. One of them is an ex-student of the college and a friend of
the other student. She was really just visiting. The other student
attends twice every week. She is enrolled in a Cambridge course and
has been coming along to the IELTS class for a few months like this
even though she is not entitled to do so. She used to be in my class
and when she asked me if she could continue to come along even after
the Cambridge course started, I told her that it was not allowed but
that she could if she wanted to. This is a not particularly critical
incident, however it contravenes the rule that the only students in
attendance should be those who are enrolled for that course. I don't
feel guilty about breaking this rule in the case of one student and I
have done this occasionally in the past, though I would not like to be
cought. The consequences would probably not be severe anyway, just a
warning not to do it again. The conflict here is the college's desire
to make money and to run a disciplined ship versus my willingness to
have extra students in my class who appreciate the teaching and have
not paid. It is one of the core conflicts of ELICOS between the
businesspeople who run the colleges for profit, often with little
understanding or concern about education, and the teachers, who tend
to see their work as part of a caring profession and definitely
appreciate having students who like them and/or who want to study
hard.

Friday 14 November 1997
[Notes made in the afternoon and typed up on 17 November]
In the morning EAP class we did a video on Australian kids going into
uni. There was about 10 ten minutes left and I found an old
promotional video sitting on the machine, so I put it on for all of us
to watch together. It was above all a laugh for all of us. It was
about seven years old and most of the staff who appeared in it are now
elsewhere, particularly at [name of college]. There was the usual corny
promotional music and way of presentation of a packet experience
109: called English and fun in Australia. It centred around a Swiss
110: student writing home to her parents about what a great all-round time
111: she was having, particularly with her homestay. One guy who has been
112: having trouble with his homestay and is soon to move out laughed a
113: lot.
114:
115: Schools' advertising is about as honest as anyone else's, so our
116: watching the video not as a serious item was more a consideration of
117: the nature of any advertising rather than a dig at the college. I
118: don't think management would like to have their rosy image of their
119: business taken less than seriously, but that's more their problem than
120: mine. Again, it is the conflict of the priorities teaching vs.
121: profit/image.
122:
123: Week Two Monday 17 November 1997 Nothing for today.
124:
125: Tuesday 18 November 1997 Nothing for today.
126:
127: Wednesday 18 November 1997 Nothing for today.
128:
129: Thursday 20 November 1997
130: [Notes made in the evening and typed up on the following morning]
131: On Thursday there was a send-off for one of the managers who had been
132: there for just over a year. The owners had given her four weeks'
133: notice apparently as yet another cost-cutting measure. In her case it
134: was a kind of poetic justice as she had always been putting the screws
135: on tighter on teachers and in particular had been instrumental in
136: getting rid of one teacher who had been around for more than ten
137: years. They put out a memo saying there would be drinks for her at
138: 4pm and I felt like not going but decided to go along just to see what
139: kind of lies, half-truths and hypocrisies would be uttered at her
140: passing. I got there and hung around for half an hour, but by then
141: the official speeches had still not been given and I had something
142: else to do, so I left. While I was waiting there, I spoke with a
143: member of staff who I had barely spoken to for almost a year. She had
144: acted as management's sheriff at union meetings and staff meetings,
145: which was nauseating given her more radical past. I was until
146: recently the union rep, which meant that what she was doing had in
147: particular clashed with my role. We talked about inconsequential
148: things, which might help return our working relationship to normal,
149: though we don't actually work together. That was good since I don't
150: particularly like being on on-going bad terms with people. Due to the
151: many changes which have taken place here over the past two years,
152: mostly as a result of it changing from a co-operative to a normal
153: business, there are a number of factors which make the conflicts there
154: different that elsewhere, perhaps more politicized. My relations with
155: those two women are colored by that.
156:
157: Friday 20 November 1997 Nothing for today.
158:
159: Week Three Monday 24 November 1997
160: [Notes made in the afternoon and typed up at night]
161: Some very minor matters. We have to keep attendance records of
162: students to see if they comply with the 90% regulation. This is a bit
163: complicated here and requires getting data from a couple of sources,
some of which is not always kept well, so that it may appear students
did not attend an activity beyond the classroom which they did in fact
to attend. I'm usually quite careful with it but today I just filled in
the spaces for those students who I felt would have attended but who,
according to the record had not been there, and when I asked them
later they said they had in fact done so. It's another conflict
between bureaucratic rules (in this case by the Department of
Immigration) and a teacher's desire to do well by students who make a
serious effort at study.

Something else which happened today was that a student who is in the
other EAP class came to me and said he wanted to change over into my
morning class. He used to be in a class of mine and it was flattering
for me that he wanted to come back for more. I told him the procedure
-- the necessity to speak to his present teacher first then to a
senior teacher or the DoS -- and that he could tell them it's fine by
me if he comes into my class. I didn't ask him why he wanted to
change class because I assumed he was not satisfied with the other
teacher and, because of my own past negative experiences, I don't like
other teachers being subjected to that. There are similarities with
the "cigarette man" incident almost a fortnight ago, but this time in
reverse.

I'm naturally always happy when students like being in my class and I
want the DoS to know it too, particularly as on a few occasions over
the past few years she and her predecessor "had words" with me
regarding students who didn't like me or my teaching and I was put
through the wringer of lesson observations to see whether I was up to
scratch or not. This is a conflict due to the "quality control" of
teaching by the management. The trouble is that students become
"clients" who can damage a person's employment prospects and
management can use it to intimidate or get rid of a teacher they no
longer want, for whatever reason. We deal with hundreds of students,
but naturally like humans everywhere they don't to the boss to say
something positive, but to complain. I really dislike the regular
student evaluation system here and the way it is dealt with so that
you often do not even hear about it if you have positive appraisals,
but it makes your life hell if a couple of students, for whatever
reason, complain. It's really out of proportion if we are expected to
please almost all of the people all of the time. No further entries
made until the end of week four.

Some other courses finished today, though not my courses, and I got a
pang of the feeling I get sometimes of the transitory nature of EFL.
The teachers have a big turnover, both voluntary and involuntary, and
the students turn over at an even faster rate. When I first started
teaching in Sydney ten years ago, the visa regulations meant that
students signed on for much longer courses and there was more a sense
of continuity, though even then too there was a feeling of sadness at
the end of a course. It was rare that I was actually sad that I would
not be seeing certain individual students any more, rather it is an
existential sadness at the concrete manifestation of life moving on,
leaving a bit of an empty feeling. With five-week courses it is hard
219: to notice any great improvement in individuals' English proficiency
220: anyway, but there is something Sysophian about the constant treadmill
221: of courses, something both tiring (I'm sick of doing EAP and once more
222: will ask to be given a temporary break from it) and pointless, an
223: asking of myself where I am going with my life. School teachers or
224: Foundation Studies teachers are said to get a greater sense of
225: achievement through their longer association with students or groups
226: of students, though I would much prefer to be in ELICOS than in the
227: high school system.
228:
229: That's all for the diary, so I'll add a couple of points which did not
230: occur in the four-week period.
231:
232: I have noticed several times that I prefer having Asian to European
233: students and feel far more relaxed with the former. I think one
234: reason for this is because the whites tend to be greater complainers
235: and less respectful of teachers and this puts me on my guard. Though
236: I have more in common with the Euros culturally, many of them appear
237: to me as spoiled chewing-gum-chewing self-absorbed children of excess
238: consumption. Fortunately I have had few European students in the last
239: few years, a consequence of concentrating on EAP/IELTS and avoiding
240: Cambridge preparation courses.
241:
242: As the Cambridge courses finished last Friday, a number of teachers
243: didn't have their contracts extended. If I took holidays now or in
244: January, which I don't want to do, someone would have a bit more work.
245: Plus, with the recent economic events in Asian countries, my vague
246: plans to move workplaces have been put on hold for a while. To go
247: part time would solve many problems, but I doubt whether they'll let
248: me.
249:
3.3  D3

1: Once again the issue of cultural awareness was raised, not in my class
2: but at school, and its a problem that has been repeated throughout my
3: teaching. A teacher reprimanded a new Korean student for wearing a hat
4: in class, this of course drew unwanted attention to the student who
5: became quite distressed. She consequently banded together the Koreans
6: to form a deputation about racism towards Korean students - it seems
7: that the Korean students are quite sensitive to this type of issue as
8: many times this incident has arisen in one way or another. A little
9: more tact from teachers and a little less over reaction from students
10: is probably the solution.
11:
12: This leads onto the issue of over reaction from both students,
13: teachers and management. Many times I've had students distraught over
14: 1 or 2% of a test score, over their errors in writing etc. Even when
15: counselled they aren't really content.
16:
17: Over reaction from myself and other teachers - Oh my god I've made a
18: spelling error! Oh no I forgot to explain point 7000 about the simple
19: past!
20:
21: Overreaction from management - if you didn't place a tick in the right
22: box so therefore life as we know it will cease to exist - meanwhile
23: bigger issues such as airconditioning systems that create arctic and
24: desert conditions are to be tolerated!! (Probably this is one familiar
25: complaint from teachers!)
26:
27: Brings me to the issue of the casualisation of our industry and how
28: teachers tolerate and shut up out of fear of offending management who
29: take general complaints as personal attacks. Perhaps a little
30: bargaining skills in teacher training is worthwhile - otherwise
31: management succeed by allowing 'time' to wear down reasonable demands.
32:
33: I suppose this brings me to the problem of economics versus education
34: within our industry. Classes closed, put together, students at
35: inappropriate levels to facilitate numbers. I could write forever
36: about this but I'm sure you get the gist.
37:
38: Marketing issues are always difficult - what does a teacher do when a
39: student is in the wrong level due to classes being full?
40:
41: What does a teacher do when its freezing in the class and the students
42: are more interested in the internal climate and complaining about the
43: studying?
44:
45: Where is the teacher and where is the marketing manager within each
46: teacher?
47:
48: I remember being told numerous times to smile and greet students
49: around the school - even rude obnoxious bastards!
50:
51: Last week I had a problem in my class of students continually speaking
52: their own language - after many years of teaching I usually politely
ask them to leave a speak outside in their language - on this occasion
it was some oh so cool French students who each time I asked them to
leave, apologised profoundly but then continued to rave on in French.
After days of this I really lost my patience and blew up but I wonder
if this is necessary - I was feeling pressured that week - I often
feel as though I dragged the student off the street, held a gun to
their head and said 'learn English' - this continues to fascinate me.

I'm also constantly aware of disinterested eyebrow raising students
who I want to slap across the face! HARD

Another problem is the disinterested student - the moaner, the
sleeper, the victim. How effectively does one handle them when you
have to see them everyday? The perfect formula stills eludes me.

I suppose its also important to consider the classes you hate -
whether it be the topics or the students. Is it the case of a smile
all day? (I sound negative but there are classes I love)

I meant to mention the over enthusiastic student who always dominates
- a difficult job to contain. Usually I have a private chat and that
works (but not this month). Speaking of love what are the boundaries
here with professionalism? I know many teachers who have had affairs
with students. How do you teach effectively if there's someone
gorgeous in your class. I know sometimes I end up talking or teaching
just to them. One must remain focused.

I've had a few hassles with crushes from Japanese girls - some have
been a bit like fatal attraction - midnight phone calls (silly move to
give out your number), stalking etc.

I'm not joking about this it's been a real pain. I've stopped
socialising with students due to this and the fact that it can take
over your whole life!

I also find it difficult to cope with private questions or
bombardments for the class. I always try to explain on day 1
inappropriate questions but as the relationship grows its difficult to
contain. I know many teachers who've had to deal with sexual
harassment or homophobia. Not fun and I've seen colleagues in tears
from time to time. These issues are hard culturally and I almost had
students killing each other in my class this week about different
issues. We have cultural awareness packages today which are great but
I don't think we still do enough.

I think one issue that bothers me is the lack of preparation time -
we're meant to do a million things with no time. Magicians - maybe!
The casualisation of the industry continues to encourage
disempowerment. Recently we've received some new computers and I know
we'll have a few inservice lectures about them but that's it. I feel
to really know the computers books etc, we need more time to look them
over - otherwise they remain underutilised.

I've found recently teachers are expected to do more and more in their
spare time - not prep time - if you enquire about something management
will say - Oh yes of course you're welcome to look at the new package thoroughly - on your own time!! Many times I feel as though I don't know the functions of the computer or lab well enough and I feel that the students deserve for me to know it fully. I don't like to bluff my way through but I also don't like spending more time then necessary at my job without being paid for it. It's a dilemma and I watch many teachers do hours and hours extra without a cent.

Now I suppose I want to think about over-preparedness. I watched a colleague cut and paste for hours to make something minimally better. I think time utilisation is not fully exploited in teacher training and I don't mean lesson planning I mean changing, rewriting things that are 80% Ok and you can work around it without a huge hassle. I often get teachers asking me how I get away with so little preparation. I firmly believe that they are wasting their time joining the cut and paste phenomenon which has swept our industry! I also recently had a younger teacher ask me about 'warmers' which I only use occasionally and she was shocked by this - I often don't use them because I find them unnecessary with adults and especially in higher levels (I'm aware some are fantastic).

I'm not articulating myself very well at present but I think I'm thinking. I'm trying to say that I don't like seeing a class run like a primary school, or for that matter I don't like my place of employment being run like a primary school. I hope you can decipher my meaning - it's just recently I've been complaining more and more about this issue and more and more students have complained to me about it as well.

I think it's time to mention the difficulties of large classes - with particular reference to the varying levels within each class. Usually I teach advanced classes but recently I've been teaching beginners. I think the biggest problem that I've faced is that I've noticed that I tend to ignore or forget about some quiet students (in my class of 17). Even though I remind students I find the more outgoing students continue to gain my attention. I also have an occasion given up trying to explain something to a student who is having extreme difficulties understanding - I know it's bad but due to time constraints I often just smile and move on leaving the student somewhat in limbo. It's that dreaded time factor coming into play again!

I have also developed a bad habit of trying to please students who are really 'negative' in their attitude or behaviour. It really annoys me that I focus so much on them and not on the students who really want to learn and who work really hard. I've spoken to my colleagues and they all say the same thing that when someone is being really negative it gains their attention and they try to please that student often at the expense of the others.

On thing I also wanted to talk about is the problems that arise when students opinions radically differ from you won eg. you will die in hell because you don't go to church every Sunday.

I often find myself getting rather irritated and pissed off at the narrow mindedness or often downright racistness (new word - poetic license?) or some of the students. I find that often this drives me to
Sometimes I argue but nowadays I just say something along the lines of - well that's your opinion, not everyone agrees etc. It's hard because I'm sure you can imagine what I really want to say. How much sexism, racism, etc should we expect? How impertinent are we expected to be whilst maintaining our own dignity? Again we're back to the grey areas of this job and I don't imagine for one second that there's any simple answer.

I don't fall to pieces when this happens but often I feel that I'm selling my beliefs short and I don't feel comfortable with that. I suppose it's not just an issue in this industry but it is one that we face repeatedly.

The issue of students thinking that it is really cool or shocking to swear in class came up again last week. It is usually my policy to teach taboo words but often some students like to overuse the words for their 'shock value'. I often ask them if they would use the same language in their country and of course they reply that they wouldn't but in the next breath they continue with the 'fucks'.

We had a discussion last week regarding 'testing' and I feel that too many teachers are catering the test for their students to achieve great results. I do not advocate an unfair test and am well aware of the pitfalls of assessment but without an accurate measure of ability our classes often become unworkable. Some teachers seem to think a mark of 60% is a fail or in some way a representation of their own failure to 'teach'. Seems we have so many students with a pass rate of 80 - 90% who can't speak.

I was speaking to a colleague who teaches at another institution and we spoke about the problems of some teachers being too afraid to take sick leave because of the reaction from management. She told me how inconvenient it was for her to be ill! (Inconvenient for her as well I suppose).

I also know some teachers who work on through a cold for flu because they don't want to be a 'bother' to their DOS. I think it's unimportant that trainee teachers are carefully made aware of their rights - not necessarily from the union but from the trainers. I suppose it comes back to a point I made earlier about people feeling rather insecure about their jobs and not wanting to rock the boat - although the denial of sick leave through what is paramount to emotional blackmail is completely unacceptable.

I think my last point should be to emphasise the need for teachers to get together - not necessarily for an inservice as such but for an informal meeting to be given the opportunity to discuss resources, hints, ideas and problems. I think idea sharing pools were really well at my place of employment and should be encouraged in all institutions. These are not only unavailable for new teachers but also for those who have more experience.

I think this diary has been great therapy for me and perhaps the idea
of a diary for new teachers is not such a bad one - as long as it doesn't become too time consuming. I hope you find my thoughts, moans and groans useful and I wish you luck in the future with your work.
At the end of a working day we were asked to say back for a special announcement. ‘Course programs’ were distributed for each level. We were to peruse them and discuss at the next staff meeting. It was not long before I felt that these programs were very odd indeed and even confused some teachers. They will eventually replace the present lesson plan record in which teachers record what was taught every session. The new program consists of units (1 unit per week) divided into subgroups - structures are to be tick off when taught and dated. Initially one would think this was an efficient way streamlining the school’s teaching program. It is actually an ill-informed move which seems to have no guiding principles/methodology in mind. I am familiar with 2 basic systems: 1) a course based largely on a coursebook, with supplementary activities 2) a curriculum - fully-referenced which lists a range of structures, lexis and skills which should ideally be covered each week. Each has their advantages and pitfalls. This ‘new’ program seemed an unsatisfactory mix of both and caused me to feel distinctly uneasy about whether whoever had designed this program knew what they were doing. My program for Pre-int level was loosely based on the Headway Pre-int book yet it was also to be used by teachers who used a different book ‘Language in Use’ for which no references were given. Unit’s are divided into the trad. Categories 1) structures and functions 2) themes and vocabulary 3) speaking and listening 4) reading and writing 5) additional resources used. Despite the new direction the program is taking there is little acknowledgement of this ie structure is all important and used to teach functions and this is supplemented by themes and vocab - I wondered what all this was leading to and still have to decide how I will phrase my comments. I had a long discussion with another teacher who, despite many years of experience, felt totally confused by this document. It takes the headings of the coursebooks as its aim - yet presents as an independent program - or is it a syllabus. My sneaking suspicion is that it will be used as a way of checking that teachers are covering the necessary material. Instructions such as ‘Please insert the date each structure was taught’ give me a good idea of what the designer of the form thinks language teaching/learning is all about. I would heartily disagree with many of the assumptions made and herein is my dilemma. I suspect that ‘streamlining and controlling’ the final product is the goal here. I feel that many new things are being introduced into this particular school. In addition, another form was produced - titled Original Teaching Activity; ‘you will produce four of these a module’ (5 weeks) in which an activity, its aims and procedures were to be described. I wondered if this was really for the use of all the teachers or whether it was more important that this would eventually be collated and printed in a booklet under the school’s name (mentioned twice). Many of these recent innovations do not yet seem to have their origins in teaching staff but come down from above - admin and management. It seems like teachers’ lives are going to have to be adjusted in order.
54: to fill in with the needs of the school.
55:
56: I can already predict that it is the teachers who are more experienced
57: and have further qualifications who quietly question the validity,
58: necessity and wisdom of these new pieces of paper. The real dilemma
59: will come when we are asked to comment at a staff meeting. The newest
60: teachers will happily agree to anything, older ones will murmur, some
61: will speak up and others will not because it would cause too much
62: trouble - it's easier to keep quiet and you will at least keep your
63: job!
64:
65: (Dates same as above)
66: I have a new 'small' Pre-int class of 8 students. The class is a good
67: one and as most are good Elementary level I'd rather it didn't grow. I
68: was told that classes were starting small and my class could grow to
69: 16 - many to be added next week. The pressures of continuous enrolment
70: and large class size mean I won't be able to
71: devote sufficient attention to slower and weaker students but know
72: from previous experience that objections to large class sizes will be
73: met by looks of disapproval from management. I will somehow be at
74: fault for causing trouble, rocking the boat. We all know that
75: financial concerns are uppermost - that we can never have 2 classes of
76: 8 when there could be a class of 16. I These consideration also affect
77: placement decisions - students will be moved up or down so that class
78: sizes are neat and may be moved up because they've already 'done the
79: book' of a certain class. Objections will be met with stony looks.
80:
81: 2/1, written 2/1
82: I'm writing about this incident particularly because it is recurrent
83: in a multilingual teaching situation - 2 of which I have experienced
84: (Britain and Australia) where s's live with a host family in order to
85: improve their English. Today they talked about/reviewed their new
86: living situations. There is often dissatisfaction - today P said she
87: was moving into a flat because she was unhappy - had requested
88: non-smoking and no animals) got smoking and animals and was living in
89: a 3m x 3m room in bunk beds which was very noisy - room and board cost
90: $170 a week - they asked me if I thought it was cheap or expensive,
91: how much bills were etc, which parts of Sydney were cheap to live in.
92: This situation happens time and time again. As a teacher I know I'm
93: supposed to send them to the people who organise homestay, not join in
94: with and support their criticisms - I don't always do this -
95: sometimes we know that some people take s's for financial reasons
96: only, provide poor conditions and little interaction, others are
97: mansions with friendly welcoming Australians.
98:
99: I think this situation comes about because (esp. for lower level
100: students with limited communication skills in English) their teacher
101: is the one person they see on a daily basis, talk to and trust. I am
102: torn between my roles as school representative one ought to defend the
103: product but over this aspect I have no control but I learn a lot
104: about similar dilemmas occurred when a student showed me photos she
105: had of a filthy bathroom in her homestay and asked 'Is this normal?' I
106: had to say that I thought it was disgusting but do not forget being
107: told at a recent meeting by the marketing manager that it didn't help
108: things when we sided with students against management on issues
concerning student welfare, school activities, visas, attendance, fee payment and changing classes and anything else one could imagine. It seems that the teacher is required to play a silent mindless role whilst at the same time being responsible for everything that happens in the classroom every day of the week. Connected to the above - yet another new form introduced - teachers are to note any problems they encounter and forward this to Senior Teacher/Admin immediately. This is to catch/anticipate problems to avoid complaints from agents months later. I feel like I'm expected to be part educator, part marketing manager. What infuriates me is that there is no avenue/channel for teachers' problems/complaints or dissatisfaction. Their resolution brings little financial advantage or satisfaction and allowing them to be aired would mean a total rethinking of the way the school was organised. Student grievances are to immediately noted, passed on and dealt with whilst some teachers are quietly discontented. Where is the teachers' memo/suggestion box?

A memo from the DOS about creating a system for teacher development - to help improve existing skills and techniques, increase knowledge and acquire new skills. I feel that this is a very good idea but clearly hope I will be working somewhere else but the time it is implemented. The DOS and Head Teacher have, to my knowledge, no further qualification in TESOL, Applied Linguistics (eg an MA or RSA Dip) and know less than I do about recent issues and directions in teaching/linguistics. I not only feel compromised professionally but insulted. The owner of the school has not bothered to employ people with the relevant and necessary qualifications. I have worked for a number of schools where observations were conducted on a regular basis. Like everybody I hate being observed, but welcome feedback and useful advice from those better qualified than myself, I'm not referring to teacher training. It is almost embarrassing that we will be observed by someone who is not qualified in the field. 'Excellence in language teaching' ie 'the pursuit of excellence' is one the school's aims and/or mottos and it is still unclear to me what this really is. Does this mean good results in Cambridge Exams using the latest methodology, sending students away happy, pushing students quickly up through the school. I suspect that all of this will not be done well at all, that simplistic ideas about teaching and learning languages will be suggested and the old p.p.p. line will be pushed. My dilemma here is not one of differing methodologies but rather introducing teacher development because it is an important condition of being affiliated to X, the biggest chain of private ELT colleges in the world. Interestingly teacher development in itself is not enough: of a reason ..... we are being encouraged to 'help realise the company goal'? The word company makes me feel like a stockbroker not a teacher and this isn't the 1st time I've been involved in teacher development because we must be seen to be doing it.
agreed. Should I have? I said I would say something about it but also hinted that students' complaints received a quicker response than teachers'. 'Yes, I know' replied the student 'because we pay money'. I nodded in tacit agreement. I know management would scream if they heard this. He went and complained at breaktime and so did I. I know whose complaint will be followed up first, I have been in this situation so many times - a room which is too small, unsuitable, noisy, badly located (once in a class of kids with bars on the windows on the second floor with no fire escape!) that I feel fed up. Do I shut up and accept the unacceptable or encourage them to complain - especially when they are paying a lot of money. Oddly enough, students are very aware of all those things once they have been at the school for a while. I also found that one of my new students is very early Pre-intermediate and my comments at last meeting about stricter entry testing requirements for Cambridge have gone unheeded.

I pity the poor FCE teacher who will have to mould a Pre-Int student in Upper Int material. I wonder why the school doesn't take more care about things like this - exam results would be better, students more satisfied and teachers would have an easier task. The whole problem of entry testing, levels, exam candidates, comes up time and time again. But if he has the money and wants to do a more expensive exam class - let him.

I have waited a while to write this down because I was so fed up/disgusted with what happened at the meeting.

Staff meeting at which new programs were discussed - there was lots of subtle criticism which was basically ignored - it would still be introduced.

I again brought up the problem of long versus short-term students and their conflicting goals which created a great deal of dissatisfaction. Director replied that that was 'the nature of the beast' and that was the teacher's challenge - to balance and manage this, implying that good teachers could and did, bad ones couldn't and didn't. I felt, once again, that teachers' comments, constructive criticism was being ignored. Wanted to scream.

Discussion of the program and debate about a textbook driven versus a generic syllabus caused the Director to make remarks about dependence on the books (teachers not students) people becoming lazy, I felt this was insulting to all in the room. Never could students be at fault, lazy, incapable bad language learners, lacking in motivation, everything came back to the teacher - ignores basic findings n L2 research regarding factors determining success in language learning. This meeting was, for me, a culmination of problems which have been building up a for a long time. I feel that I am in a constant state of crisis and am undecided about attending the next meeting because 1) teachers' views are ignored or used against them. 2) the people in charge don't know what they are doing - re. Methodology, language learning. 3) classes are getting bigger, rooms smaller and I can't do my job
properly

4) inexperienced teachers are conducting placement tests.

5) there is no 'management by consensus', only by tyrannical rule.

6) teachers are expected to do more and more without an increase in
pay or thanks.

It goes on and on.

On this same day, I taught a 'study skills' course which wasn't that
at all, the cause is a PET exam practice book and I feel a sham
standing there pretending to teach them stuff that wasn't general
English. It was too easy and dreadfully boring, when I told the Head
Teacher this - she could do much because that was the least
troublesome of the courses. I find it problematic because I know these
options are being offered so that the school can be seen to be
offering a diversified product. The problem is less the problem
itself but knowing that offering criticisms or suggestions for change
won't be well received and that I have to think carefully before doing
this in front of management? Will I be re-employed, regarded as a
troublemaker? Will the person I talk to understand what it is I'm
talking about? I doubt it - the week has been filled with constant
sources of tension and stress. Tomorrow - new students and a third
room change an trying to help these s's assimilate in the middle of a
course when I feel they're just being added to classes to reach the
school max of 16. The only way I can deal with numbers like this is to
go on automatic pilot and do fairly mundane stuff - I think the
students are quite happy with this but I feel frustrated when I know
they could achieve more in a class of 8. This has happened at every
school I've worked at.

A student was unhappy because she felt that by doing skills work in
afternoon lessons we weren't 'studying English' which is grammar and
writing. I had a long discussion with her trying to explain the usual
things. I paid a lot of money and some people are here just for
holidays and fun. What she wanted was hard work, not fun and games. I
left work feeling stressed and tired that this as a problem which
could never be solved in General English. Differing expectations,
conflicting goals, nationality, age, motivation, the image the school
gives, what actually happens and what a student expects are all
pulling at each other*. In the middle is the teacher. I nearly decided
to leave the industry that afternoon. I know that it was impossible to
keep all me students happy , teach them in a way I felt was worthwhile
and that they were also satisfied with. I am always aware of the fact
that students must be kept happy or they'll complain (I alerted the
Head Teacher who talked to the student, who is content for the
moment). I feel that I have to be all things to all people, a
magician. That afternoon I wondered what course of action I should
take and how I should teach - was I a good/bad teacher, what stance
should I take. How should I be?

I couldn't come up with a solution. So I give them what they want -
fairly regimented structure-based lessons and skills work, lots of gap
fills and grammar topped up with speaking etc activities. It's not
274: exactly trying to innovate as teaching 15 students (8 nationalities in
275: a room that is too small!!) is enough. I felt that what I was doing
276: was almost untenable and if I really did what I believed in ie
277: followed my principles - I'd leave the GE classroom forever which
278: I'll probably do. PS this seems to be the theme of the moment in our
279: staffroom. Teacher X was told by students in a Study Skills class that
280: they wanted to do Study Skills so they could practise speaking,
281: another did it for more grammar - so what is Study Skills anyway?
282: Teacher Y - had in the same session one student leave because she
283: didn't want to do so much grammar and wanted speaking, another said
284: she wanted to transfer down to do more grammar, another wants to learn
285: Business English skills , another 'I'm just a kid - I love games'.
286:
287: All this seems to lead to but one conclusion - the GE teacher needs to
288: have multiple personalities, to successfully cope with what I see as
289: an increasingly impossible situation.
290:
291: This is probably the single most important recurrent critical incident
292: that I have reported so far. Directors/owners will often reply by
293: suggesting that the teachers' skill/mastery is in their ability to
294: achieve this impossible balance. At the end of the day the teacher
295: aims for something which makes as many students as possible feel that
296: they are learning, not that their teacher is teaching them without
297: students having to put in any real effort.
298:
299: My difficult student situation was sorted out - everything was OK
300: because it wasn't my lessons that was a problem. The Head Teacher
301: actually said 'She was very happy with you ... you are a very good
302: teacher... but we knew you were a very good teacher anyway! Nobody at
303: this school has ever observed or seen me teach - students thought I
304: was good so I must be. Student is unhappy with other teacher Z so she
305: must be bad. Students judgements about quality of teaching seem to be
306: holier than thou. I was amazed that students degree of satisfaction
307: with the product was confused with/equated with actual quality*. This
308: leads to an endless cycle of s/he's a good teacher s/he's a bad
309: teacher - a game which I'm expected to play. Being good/bad seems
310: critical in determining students satisfaction and is also the reason
311: given for ultimate success or failure.
312:
313: General: Problems/disagreements/arguments/negotiation with students
314: about going up and sometimes down.
315: The idea that after so many weeks a student will have magically
316: changed from eg an Upp-Int student into an advanced one. Schools often
317: structure their courses so that students go up through the system
318: without achieving real proficiency in all/major skills at the various
319: levels - students wanting to go up because they've done all the
320: grammar in the book have/have 'done' the book before or want to leave
321: with 'Advanced' on their certificates. This week a student who had
322: been in Upp-Int for 4 weeks informed me of his plan. 1 month's holiday
323: - on his return he would spend a month in Pre-Advanced and a month in
324: Advanced. He looked puzzled when I explained that this was not
325: necessarily automatic, it depended on the level of English and his
teachers' recommendations. He won't buy a good learners dictionary, has bought a coursebook to share with his flatmate and asks me 'Could your tell me all the rules for 'of' in English?! - The system and students perception of it annoys the hell out of me. Is it only me who as language learning as the goal. The students who are most insistent about going up who spend all their time with other students, hardly open a paper and demand I tell them everything. 'I paid a lot of money' - is something students from E. Europe have said to me lately - one in reply to me asking her to get a late note, the other when I explained that I couldn't answer his (complicated and obscure) Q's while we were in the middle of an activity. Another said 'I prefer it when you tell me, when I asked him to look up a word in the dictionary for a change! Students seem to feel that all this money entitles them to make all sorts of exacting and ridiculous demands on their teacher, that I am responsible for their program and that they are there to be spoon-fed. Few students in GE show genuine motivation or display study skills/learning strategies. Most are in holiday mode and I wonder why they bother at all.

26/3, written 1/3

ANOTHER HORRIBLE STAFF MEETING

I went to this one because the DOS was giving a workshop on Classroom Management. Instead the Head Teacher lectured us about do's and don'ts for 1 hour 20 mins - with 10 minutes left over for discussion of problem students etc. We were told not to sympathise with students who complain about large classes and small rooms etc etc. Most staff suggestions were met with such a poor response that most of us felt quite brow-beaten by the end.

It wasn't leaning, rather lecturing on school policy and rules.

There is a particular problem with the Head Teacher - she discusses problems, teachers looking for jobs, what happened in the interviews and why she will/won't employ them. She mimics other teachers and compares herself to the former DOS - 'He used to arrive at 8.20 and leave at 4 on the dot - but sometimes you just have to stay when there's a lot of work etc etc' - in front of everybody!! She shouted at me this week for 'abandoning' my class. She is the source of a lot of stress and distress, many teachers are looking for other jobs. This person is out of her depth, is unqualified and naive. It devalues what we do and there is a lack of professional leadership.

Some results - some students have been grossly misplaced, relatively inexperienced teachers teach high level classes, there is a very high turnover, new teachers feel unsupported and when they ask the Head Teacher for help she gives them songs and games.

Conclusion

It may seem like I have a long litany of complaints and I guess I do.

The problems are worst at this particular school because of a number of recent changes. Better, more pleasant colleges however, can't
384: escape from some of the endemic problems.
385:
386: Ultimately I feel that I want/need to leave the industry altogether -
387: it has grown too fast. Well-qualified, professional teachers teaching
388: GE have an almost impossible task - differing student expectations and
389: study objectives conflict with what the college wants to give them
390: (which isn't itself always clear - all of these then collide with what
391: teachers want to do in the classroom and their version of the best way
392: to go about it. Students want to leave feeling they have made huge
393: progress in their English and that it is the teachers' responsibility
394: to fulfil this aim, the college and management want students to leave
395: as a satisfied client who will spread the good word and encourage them
396: to attend the school so that the Marketing Manager doesn't have to go
397: on so many o.s. trips to create new markets. Teachers want to do a lot
398: of different things - the main one is to feel they are doing
399: something rewarding and fulfilling - I don't.
400:
401:
1: 24th July
2: This is my second month with this group (following on from Elem 1). I
3: was away for the first week of the course and, upon my return, I have
4: found the problems encountered last month have only compounded this
5: month.
6:
7: The main difficulty, which I find compromising my professionalism, is
8: the huge disparity between the students' levels in this group. In my
9: experience teaching TESOL, this problem is so recurrent that I feel
10: that every month it crops up again. It is a constant threat to one's
11: professionalism and it makes tremendous demands on the teacher in
12: terms of preparation time.
13:
14: For example, last month we enrolled a Swiss German student who was a
15: true beginner rather than an Elementary student. He was without the
16: basic knowledge - of numbers, days of the week, written or spoken
17: English of any kind - that the other students possessed. Fortunately,
18: he was confident and tried to get whatever she could out of the
19: lesson, so, the school did not make any special provisions for him.
20:
21: This month there are 3 such students that have been thrown into Elem 2
22: and a handful of other weaker new students. They should be doing
23: Elementary 1, but the school obviously wants to save money and has
24: jammed them into a class of 15. I spoke to the director about this
25: problem, and he said that we might be able to create 2 next week when
26: some new students arrive.
27:
28: In the meantime, I have to spend twice as long preparing lessons in
29: other to meet the needs of 2 distinct groups being taught at the same
30: time. On top of this, I have been asked to resume an area of
31: responsibility after school hours for which all of my hours have been
32: withdrawn, since the school has shrunk along with teaching staff.
33: Initially I refused to take on this extra responsibility, but have
34: resumed reluctantly in order to preserve the services the school
35: promises students in the brochure. It is not 4:45 as I sit here
36: recording my day. Not only am I tired, but I have a strep A infection
37: from a tropical ulcer and I really should have gone home at 3:30, my
38: contracted hours and rested up!
39:
40: 25th July
41: This morning I fortunately checked on the study centre (language lab)
42: before taking my class in. It had never been left unlocked, and 10 of
43: the tapes for recording had been removed to some unspecified
44: destination. Once again, I was lucky to find a box of blank tapes to
45: use (missing tapes has been an ongoing problem). When the students
46: went into the lab, some of the machines were playing up (as usual). 2
47: were completely out of order. (These have been out of commission for a
48: few months). One was squeaking incessantly and couldn't be placated
49: despite ingenious manipulations. Another didn't record properly. Yet
50: another did not record at all.
51:
52: Nevertheless, I need to count myself as fortunate once again, because
53: students were absent today, so we had just enough machines to go
54: around! I find it a pity, though, that my capability to provide
55: elementary students with the pronunciation practice they need is
56: constantly compromised by deteriorating equipment which isn’t
57: consistently serviced.
58:
59: 31st July
60: Today we got another new student - which pushes our class size over
61: the max. limit of 15. Once again, I was grateful that someone was
62: absence, because the students have been complaining that the class is
63: too crowded.
64:
65: Tomorrow I’ll need to do a jigsaw listening instead of the language
66: lab, because we simply won’t fit with the broken down machines.
67:
68: At least the director has recognised the ramification of not having
69: opened on Elementary class three weeks ago. He has promised to try to
70: open one on Monday, since we have yet more new students enrolling in
71: the middle of the course.
72:
73: Last week we allowed the stronger students to move up to LINT. This
74: helped the level split a bit, but one still exists - in content as
75: much as level, since new students have been introduced into the group
76: more than once a week. This regrouping an introducing and rearranging
77: is extremely disruptive and occurs frequently at the college. It
78: becomes hard to do revision, to build on what we’ve learned or to give
79: tests. As a teacher, the lack of consistency in my class members
80: constantly compromises my professionalism.
81:
82: August 1
83:
84: Another student asked to be moved up to a ‘higher level’ today, as he
85: had perceived that the class was composed of both E1 and E2. I
86: informed him that the school was considering dividing the group into 2
87: classes on Tuesday. As a result, I won’t be able to plan for next week
88: once again, and will have to come in on my day off to do so next week.
89:
90: I just received a call from the director. The school has decided to
91: definitely not open an Elementary I class. Instead some of the
92: stronger elementary students will be artificially moved up. This
93: includes a 6 month booking - a student show should really move up
94: sequentially through the levels to attain the fluency he lacks.
95:
96: The repercussions of this decision are greater than it appears. In
97: order to move up, my students, students in higher levels will also be
98: artificially forced up - a very disastrous effect.
99:
100: 6th August
101: Today one of the students that was forced up to LINT come to me. He
102: said the class was too difficult for him and that he wouldn’t be able
103: to take the class test on Friday. I agreed with him and gave him the
104: revision test that the elementary class would be doing, so he could do
105: that one instead if he wanted to.
106:
107: Also, with my elementary class, I decided that if wouldn’t be fair to
108: give them the test officially, since they’ve arrived at various stages
of the course - the most recent only yesterday! Instead, they started
the test this afternoon and will finish it over 2 nights as homework.
Hopefully, this will create less anxiety for those who don't know some
of the material.

As for next week, it looks as if the school is going to concede on the
level split for elementary. Hopefully, the weaker students will go
back to the beginning of the syllabus/book, and the stronger ones will
go on to the more challenging material. Unfortunately, my work week
has been cut down to 2 days - a common occurrence this time of year,
even when you've worked for a company for 5 years - so I won't be here
to speak on behalf of students. At least my teaching partner will be
able to speak up for them. However, neither one of us are sure what
level we will be given. The school often prefers, I suppose out of
convenience, to randomly assign teachers to levels and change them
almost every course. This usually destroys the little consistency the
students can get from the fact that their teacher knows their needs,
strengths and weaknesses and can fend for them as best as s/he can in
the midst of a myriad of chaotic forces! If a teacher really wants to
stay with a level, s/he usually has to be very persistent in
requesting this.

August 8th
We got to read the results of the evaluation today. Several students
complained that the class size was too big and the room too narrow. A
few mentioned that the study centre was not adequate, and many
complained that the computer lab did not meet their needs.
The computer lab is definitely an ongoing saga and not one I've
mentioned before as I've not had the pleasure of personally
supervising it. However, since many of my students brought it up on
the evaluation forms, it does colour their opinion of the
'professionalism' of my college and bears mentioning.

Last year my school opened a new building, right on (Z) - and since
the day it was opened, it has largely been a marble monument for
overseas agents, politicians ready to sing the school's praises, and
any other agents willing to assist the school in publicity or
marketing. From the teachers' perspective, there have been many
pitfalls despite the flashy veneer both for themselves and their
students. Although the front rooms overlook the gorgeous blue ocean
horizon, they are not very conducive to teaching and learning.

Today at the staff meeting, teachers complained of having to wear
'sunnies' in order to bear the glare of the late-rising winter sun.
They revealed that students have been complaining that the back of
their necks have been burning as they turn from the reflected
glare. Everyone insisted that we write these complaints into the
minutes of the meeting, as their numerous requests to management over
the past years for vertical blinds have gone ignored. OHP's, needless
to say, have become a useless tool, even though many new ones were
purchased for the new building.

Anyway, back to my original point - the computer lab, which happens to
literally be the 'crowning glory' of the new building. The shook
164: invested a huge amount in 12 IBM computers and installed them in the
165: lavish penthouse, once again with sweeping views perfect for the most
166: enviable brochure.
167:
168: However, after the initial investment, attempts to actually manage
169: this new resource started to fall apart. An ex-teacher knowledgeable
170: regarding computerese was hired to organise the equipment and give
171: teachers a few blitz 'how-to-do-it' sessions. There were only 2 or 3
172: of the latter, and these were largely confusing due to our large
173: numbers and lack of prior computer training on the job. It has always
174: surprised me how the school can expect lesson materials to be desk-top
175: publishing standard and yet not be willing to assist teachers with
176: adequate training (to remedy this defect personally, I'm now taking a
177: course at (P) at my own expense - at least I'll be able to get a tax
178: deduction from it).
179:
180: The ex-teacher managing the computer lab soon had a major
181: disagreements with the management. Consequently, he left after only a
182: few weeks of part time work before the computers were all properly
183: linked to the printers and all the initial kinks had been worked out.
184:
185: The school then made an agreement with (B), that they would use our
186: facilities to give computer courses to our students and teachers. (B)
187: subsequently can in and undid the organisation of the hired
188: ex-teacher. They installed their own software on the machine and
189: linked them to the server. This system made access to the computer
190: even more difficult requiring every student in the school to be issued
191: with 2 access cards. What's more, is (B) pulled out too (when they
192: didn't get the enrolments expected and left us with complications.
193:
194: The upshot is that teaches have been unable to print directly off the
195: computers for months. Many have stopped taking tie classes there as
196: they would have to individually save each students' work onto a disc
197: and transfer it one computer to print final copies of work. With all
198: the other stresses of individual students and the frequent problems
199: with the printer it all becomes too stressful.
200:
201: Therefore this potentially tremendous resources is only left to be
202: used by students 1 hour a week in computer lab or after school. Most
203: of the new students that have trickled in during the course have not
204: been issued access codes, as the teacher who has inherited supervision
205: is on holiday. They then naturally came to me and their other teachers
206: to express their resentment at being locked out of the computers. I,
207: for one, being in the old building, had no idea that the main teacher
208: looking after the computers was away, so I told them to go and see
209: him. No wonder the poor students have expressed their frustration with
210: the computer lab on the evaluation forms.
211:
212: August 15
213: I have been moved off the problematic elementary level, bust as I
214: previously predicted, the lack of concern for originally placed
215: students at the correct level has negatively affected the dynamics of
216: the higher ones. This could plainly be seen by the poor performance of
217: the students show have been artificially and prematurely forced up to
218: the LINY 3 class due to lack of room in the lower levels. As we
219: teachers persistently informed the directors and management about our
220: ability to cater for the level mix in a maximally, or should I say
221: 'oversized, elementary class. Nevertheless, they refused to open an
222: Elementary 1 class due to cost saving measures.
223:
224: In any case, returning to my original point of the consequences of
225: this choice. This past week, I inherited the LINT 3 class, and the
226: student who had been at the school the longest, was in many ways the
227: weakest. She refused to speak and wanted me to feed her words on a
228: silver spoon, which she then ineptly reiterated. This particular
229: student was one who had clamoured to be move up, even though I
230: counselled her and advised her against it because of her lack of
231: fluency, inaccuracy, pron difficulties, etc.
232:
233: Nevertheless, when the school itself decided to do a reshuffle, we
234: chose this student go up. The philosophy was one I've seen repeatedly
235: arise, that is 'give the customer what s/he wants, regardless of
236: educational objectives.
237:
238: The result of following such a philosophy was the same on this
239: occasion as always. A student left up without truly improving her
240: fluency, perhaps the one area where we can sometimes make a
241: significance difference.
242:
243: August 22nd (Fri)
244: The winter season saga of students constantly coming and going reached
245: the heights of absurdity today. As we were taking the compulsory class
246: photos for the four students leaving at the end of week 2, a girl I
247: had never seen before was not only hovering around us smiling at me,
248: but she was attempting to wedge her way into the photos. Not wanting
249: to exclude any (college) students or hurt anyone's feelings I didn't
250: question her. However, after the proceedings, she approached me,
251: wanting to know where her certificate was. I naturally felt awkward
252: about not having one prepared, but at the same time felt somewhat
253: justified. After all, this girl had simply been dumped in our level
254: after a month at the school. She couldn't have enjoyed the change very
255: much, because she hardly attended. Even the last day she had skipped
256: class entirely and had simply make an appearance at the end to get the
257: certificate.
258:
259: Perhaps one could pin the problem on the slack student, but I feel the
260: school should have pointed out that she was leaving the very next week
261: they shifted her to our class! The lack of a reliable system to track
262: the movement of students and pass on the necessary information about
263: them has long been a problem. It is left to the teacher to check a
264: lengthy leavers list at the end of each week, in alphabetical rather
265: than class order. There is another list issued week 1 with the leaving
266: dates, but if students enter the class at anytime after this point,
267: these dates aren't listed. Teachers then have to make enquiries, search
268: for Day 1 sheet if they're available, or access the (S) computer
269: system. As far as the latter option goes, most teachers aren't trained
270: to enter the database, nor does the need of passwords encourage them
271: to try.
272:
273: At the staff meeting today, a few promises were made relating to
274: problems I've mentioned in this journal. The school has agreed to put
275: up some blinds at the (college) to shade the students from the glaring
276: sun. However, they have decided only to put a tinted shade on either
277: side of the sliding glass door. I sincerely doubt this is going to
278: protect the students from sunburn, and it certainly is not going to
279: darken the room enough to use the OHP.
280:
281: The directors also said that the repairman would be coming to the
282: study centre. Despite this gesture in the right direction, though, the
283: teachers have their doubts that this will solve the undependability
284: problems of this resource. After all, the repairman has come in
285: several times before, and the equipment always seems to break down
286: soon after. Perhaps a new language lab is in order.
287:
288: Finally, we were also promised that the mess in the computer lab would
289: be straightened out. The network that (B) had installed will be
290: removed. I just hope that the new networking isn't worse. As well,
291: students who want to use e-mail will now have to pay an extra fee, and
292: they will be issued with a disc at the beginning of their course.
293: Perhaps the changes in the computer lab are motivated more by the
294: promise of these profits than they are by a desire to have a
295: dependable resource for teachers and students. Whatever the underlying
296: cause, I suppose that we staff can only feel grateful if the
297: improvements actually materialise after these months of madness.
298:
299:
300:
301:
3.6  D6

1: 29th May 97
2: 3.50
3: While passing through the library a senior teacher entered with a group of Japanese people in tow. I remember stopping and wondering what my role in their passage should entail. Initially I was unsure who they were - visitors, prospective students, enrolled students or study tour participants or agents. When I decided they were new to the campus, the next question was whether to assume a helpful smiling demeanour, carry on with my business or wait for the teacher to introduce me. I settled for a hesitant smile and excused myself. The senior teacher gave little indication as to whether this was what was expected. This is not the first time I've been undecided as to what role I should adopt - teacher or customer service rep. Those present ten Japanese students (?), senior teacher, relief librarian, students in library and myself.

17: 5.10
18: While leaving a Writing Group meet R, C, and B and I chatting about teaching policy connected with ................. Ran into DOS. He challenged or made some remark, felt the need to halt conversation and assume role of deferent employee. Hate that feeling. Always felt that way with him.

23:
24: 30th May
25: Teacher Development sessions of the most pleasant part of my week. Today's "The Best laid plans.... lessons that come unstuck".

27:
28: 1. Group work was almost a confessional session. Participants were supposed to share frequency and personal strategies for coping with derailed lessons. A head teacher was in my group and it felt quite difficult to talk about bad lessons (recent ones) while Management is constantly cutting back staff and trimming hours of sessional teachers. Whether or not disclosure in a workshop is used as a basis of making decisions about teaching competency is hard to determine. I find it hard to believe it could be fully erased from a Management Agent's memory.

36: 2. In pairs in the later stage of a similar workshop. We were discussing whether or not students should have to really stretch in class. My partner suggested that the lowest common denominator is the place to aim, therefore ensuring a warm fuzzy feeling of achievement for every lesson. He related this to customer contentment. I took the view that it was better to make people reach higher and that pitching to the middle of the class or higher was better. Others to an interest in this and it surprised me to feel like I was being case as someone who was unconcerned with student happiness (Not so).

47:
48: A vocal group maintained that customer satisfaction was the most n. b. factor to be kept in mind during the lesson. Keep em happy!

50:
51: 2/June/97
52: Conversation in Staff Room. Head T. put an overseas researcher in a Pre Int class. The student subsequently proved to be an elementary
Student. Teacher was told to 'dumb down the class for the duration of her stay at 6. This struck me as a poor solution, but the constraints of the staff room gave me no permission to offer an opinion. It certainly didn't seem like a smart idea to say anything. The whole measure of each lesson was to be modified.

3/June/97
HT asked me to fill in an early leavers form for a student who had already departed. This form rates S, the 4 macro skills (ASLPR) and their performance in class. After due consideration, I gave her the form. She was a little disappointed in my ratings. She asked me to reconsider. I replied that I had thought it through carefully, yet she indicated that if was too low. I resented amending it and she asked me to erase my results and mark it for her attention. Presumably she intended to reflect a more glowing performance that I thought appropriate. She explained this by saying that he was a special case and that she would take care of it. The implication was that my professional opinion didn't sync with another issue that I should have been aware of. I can only guess that there was a sales issue to consider. This type of thing is not atypical, T's usually intuit the situation better than I did.

5 June 4.50pm
Lesson prep interrupted DOS asks for help with some photocopying. Job Desc?

6/June/97
Professional Development Session today threw up similar feeling to previous one. This dealt with a workshop that sought to provide metaphors for individual teaching style. Once again several assistant head teachers were present and I couldn't help thinking that it was unwise to be completely open about personal teaching philosophy.

When paired with a teacher who I trusted and who had always taught at 6 for an extended period. I remarked that it felt uncool to talk about or challenge some ideals. She told me that it best to be extremely careful about what I said in the earshot of some teacher (senior teachers!) as they would make judgments about personnel based on these comments.

She seemed particularly tuned in to the institutional culture and it was reassuring to hear her voice some of the reservations I had been personally entertaining about there matters. She stressed that saying the right things and being seen to fit into the school and its implicit assumptions about teaching was more important than what went on in the classroom.

Writing this journal has become somewhat of a covert (outlaw?) activity and I think I'll keep it locked in my briefcase from now on.

Today's observations continue to be a worry in the light of ongoing insecurity of tenure/job security.

My metaphor (assigned by my partner) was 'Buddy'. My position on
testing, roll taking made up a profile of a teacher of less value than 'cartographer' 'Mad Professor' etc etc.

I'll:

12 June

1. A program manager recounted an incident between himself and DOS. He had been asked to cut his hair. Apparently it didn't reflect the image appropriate for the corporate culture. This teacher's hair was neat but long enough for a pony tail. It seems his presentation was more important than his teaching ability. As a dip qualified he was most confused.

2. A lesson I had collaborated on with another teacher focussing on Pauline Hanson was vetoed by the Head Teacher. Reasoning was that if was too sensitive from a marketing perspective. The topic was in response to a student request. The tension between pedagogy and company demands was particularly obvious here. The other teacher was a bit surprised by all this and was under the impression that student generated subject matter was OK to use regardless of topic. I am no longer so sure about this. All the crap about needs analysis, social utility and authentic materials contents all seems like rhetoric these days.

13 June

Once again ASLPR rating time and customer expectations etc play as big a role as competency or preparedness for a jump up to the next class.

There seems to be a number of coded phrases that mean 'Put this person up to keep them happy' or 'it's necessary to achieve a balance in class numbers for this person to be promoted'.

Typical egs are - 'She always does her homework'

- 'His attendance is good, what do you think?'

Of course only the senior teacher can say these things. It's a very confusing process. It would be a whole lot easier if it was a little bit more up front.

Japanese schools are much more up front with this type of thing.

16 June

H teacher asked me to brief a new teacher who is coming in to teach a demonstration lesson in my class. I wonder if being asked to pass on the cultural agreements we all tacitly make with the company is part of this. Am I supposed to say 'that which a Head Teacher doesn't dare say' Should I? Perhaps it's an acknowledgment from the school that I can be trusted to keep silent.

I'm becoming more comfortable with the undercurrent here now that I've had a chance to think about it more carefully. However, I can't help thinking it would be much better all round if management and their representatives could be a bit more explicit about their aims and expectations. It would go a long way towards cutting back the hypocrisy that this is an educational institution. It's much closer to a business that deals in education.
164: By failing to acknowledge exactly the nature of what's going on its
165: almost as if they are doomed to be an inefficient business and an
166: ineffective educational institution.
167:
168: 17th June
169: Well so much for an observed class. My fate was to have the flow of my
170: Ss learning curve interrupted so they could become disoriented by a
171: new teacher and I could be assigned dishwashing and cleaning duties.
172:
173: One wonders whether cleaning up after other people is in my job
174: description. Fairly unhappy about.
175:
176: There is a little friction in the T room. A step 8 (D) teacher who has
177: been here for a year has been continually refused a contract. Whereas
178: a step 3 (S) teacher who has been here less time has been given on and
179: a step up. Hd Teacher walked into the room and explained it by saying
180: she does everything (S) asked e.g.s [unclear], changes to her program
181: at short notice. (D) is furious. I wonder if I am cleaning up like
182: good lad so I'll be thought fit for a contract? I'm not keen on being
183: a cleaner. Perhaps being given cleaning duties is an acknowledgment
184: that Management thinks I can fit in here.
185:
186: 2 teachers have interrupted my cleaning duties. Both have told me to
187: refuse these no-teaching (?) related jobs. I will continue because the
188: company employs no one to do this and if I don't I'll just have to put
189: up with the mess.
190:
191: 19th June
192: An agent bailed me up after class today. Once again that dilemma about
193: role. He asked me for a report - I slipped into Company Marketing Rep
194: mode but I couldn't help feeling that this really wasn't my job. I
195: suppose a straight referral to reception was an option. However best
196: be silent.
197:
199: Either way work it out. I found myself apologising on behalf of 6
200: Yadda Yadda Yadda
201:
202: 20th June
203: No major dramas today.
204: Only my 'computer exam'. A guy quizzing me on how to open and close
205: files with tasks that got progressively more difficult. It all felt a
206: bit like a power trip. Gatekeeping, fractional teacher are given no
207: access to training an no access to equipment without it.
208:
209: FLASH
210:
211: Another teacher is crying in the staff room at the moment. She has
212: been censored or chastised in some way for using video material
213: concerning Pauline Hanson.
214: This is a similar situation to the one previously experienced by me
215: and several others. (X) is calming her down. Teacher is the media
216: person responsible for taping radio, TV. Apparently the company sees
217: this material as being out of kilter with the kind of image that 6 is
218: trying to promote.
She was given a note that included the following: 'No matter what your missionary aims are....'

The fact that she was sent the message rather than being invited to discuss it seems to be a feature of an organisation or a body corporate rather than a school.

More and more I am becoming acutely aware that this is a company selling education rather than a school that is organised like a company. When I first arrived here I thought it was the former but since writing this diary and thinking about it I've changed my mind. It is much more like the big 'Schools' (language services) companies that dominate the market in Japan. Not as efficient though.

23 June
Testing today.

It was brought to my attention that in testing recently (controlled listening, reading and writing) a teacher was reprimanded for sending two students out for cheating.

I found several cheating in my class and felt unable to do much more that raise an eyebrow.

The loss of face clients experience is apparently bad for business.

Once again the integrity of the education compromised by business concerns - typical.

24th June
Head Teacher overheard bowing to student complaints about levels resulting from oral and written tests. Several changes as a result. It seems the customer is always right. I suppose the last few days have highlighted just how arbitrary placement really is. I've always had doubts about the precision of the testing instruments but I'm even more cynical about the process.

Providing edu-tainment tailored and sanitised for changing groups is probably the best job description for the kind of work I'm undertaking these days. I guess I really don't mind but the fiction of the inservice sessions meeting teacher practice is sometimes a little hard to swallow.

26th June
After Tuesday's reflection on self identity today I approached my work from the position of a service provider rather than a teacher per se.

It actually went quite smoothly and after one little customer service question. 'You're a good teacher aren't you?' I was a little taken aback by this. Initially but going the extra mile from a service perspective seems to be read as good teaching. Bloody revelation. I wonder if it wouldn't be something to include in teacher training courses. Not only is it read as good practice by S's, Management also
interpret it as quality education. I would still disagree with any
disagree with any argument that failed to contrast the two though.

Professional Development Session today focussed on cross cultural
difference and awareness raising (or something like that). It was held
hot on the heels of attached memo.

The presenter went to great length to disassociate herself it from the
memo however HT used the opportunity to point out the importance and
relationship of both classroom management and materials content to
future student numbers. I guess this was their idea (or hers) of issue
management.

Asst Hd Teachers approaches a teacher about a student who is leaving.
'Does x deserve our highest marks? What do you think?' there seemed
little doubt what sort of answer this type of question was supposed to
elicit. Of course the teacher supplied the answer that was required
and the student received the highest marks. This has happened quite a
couple of times over the last month and its usually because the student in
question (or their agent) is able to influence repeat or further
business for the company. I don't know if it's talked about explicitly
in some instances but it always seems to be just under the surface.

Since writing this diary the climate at 6 has changed significantly.
Industrial action has created a tension that has severely eroded my
self image as a 'service provider'. It seems that it is all one way.
Management has not been able to extend itself in negotiations with
teachers even though teachers have been bending over backwards (at
least I have) to adopt a new corporate attitude. It's all rather sad.
I feel that the climate at the moment has made it impossible to
persist with 'teacher as corporate creature'. Teaching staff are
nervous about job security and morale is low. Us and Them is the new
catch phrase. Efficiency and Professionalism feel like early
casualties. (see memos from management). The memos seem patronising
and frame any dissension as deviant and unsociable. By definition
deviants can't represent the company. It follows teachers are no
ger longer company reps.
3.7  D7

1: 14-Jul-97 05:24:19 PM
2: Must comment on something that just gave me the shits the other day;
3: on the 11th to be exact. The usual end of module meeting was called
4: for all to attend, so at 2.30 most teachers assembled around the usual
5: tables. I sometimes wonder whether the others come to these
6: 'get-togethers' with the same expectations that I have; that is, that
7: I always 'expect' the ubiquitous rap-over- the-knuckles for some
8: obscure form that none of us have filled out, or for some other inane
9: reason. I find it so difficult to remember all those bloody
10: bureaucratic documents that so often have to be filed, or photocopied
11: and handed in to such-and-such. Comes with the territory I suppose.
12: Anyway, back to my original gripe!
13: It has been, at least up until now, a policy of the school that all
14: excursions outside the school be organized around and relevant to the
15: topic of study for any one class, within any one module[4 weeks]. It
16: goes without saying that an excursion to the zoo, however enjoyable
17: for a great deal of students, would not be recommended if your topic
18: for the month/week was Health and Lifestyle. Even though this policy
19: caused some frustration amongst some of the more 'hedonistic'
20: students, and not a little consternation amongst some members of
21: staff, it was generally considered fair and therefore, adhered to. In
22: effect, it was a reasonable policy and at the very least it gave
23: students a sense of structure and purpose, which many of them lament is
24: often missing from course outlines. For me personally, it offered a
25: way out. I'm sure I'm not the only teacher who doesn't particularly
26: savour those sticky moments on the 'populist' excursion routes when
27: you're stuck for conversation with a low -Elementary class. At the end
28: of the day, this more structured approach to excursion outings helped
29: me in my planning of activities for the entire module, and the
30: personally gruelling excursion that was to come.
31: Then came the dreaded news at the Friday arvo meeting, that we are now
32: officially untethered to the policy regarding excursions; that future
33: excursions are to be FUN. I've just spent 3 odd months telling my EAP
34: students that we can't go to the Aquarium, the Zoo or the cinemas in
35: George St, because they are not relevant to our topic. I'm sure when I
36: tell them this module, that we can go anywhere they like, they'll be
37: wondering about the relevance that I so forcefully administered to
38: various disappointed classes.
39: The most frustrating thing is that I feel as though my authority has
40: been stripped away to some degree. Even if I wanted to continue with
41: excursions that dealt particularly with the topic at hand, my students
42: would protest that the other classes were doing FUN things and that
43: they weren't. Let's hope that the new policy remains so that the
44: students don't think we're taciturn . Over and out!
45: 15 July, 1997
46: Well, it's the beginning of the new module today. Last Friday I told a
47: student, a Japanese woman, that her English wasn't yet good enough for
her to be able to go to the next level. I was very aware that her good friend, also in my class, was going up a level and that there would be hell to pay. These students have been like bloody Siamese twins since day 1! And of course on Friday, when I finally came face to face with her, she was obviously very upset that she wasn't going up with her friend. I was diplomatic and sensitive to a tee, but nothing would console her and she broke down. This made me feel terrible, but I continued to try to explain the problems that she had with her language acquisition, and that if she had just another month in Pre-EAP, things might be better for her in the next module. Enter Monday morning, and there she is! Not in Pre-EAP as I'd suggested, but in EAPS, the intermediate level class I have this module! Apparently Ross, the EAP Syllabus Director had spoken with her and suggested that she go up to EAPS and not EAPV [a level even higher in which her friend is now enrolled]. I did feel rather guilty about making her cry the other day, but now I was angry. Admittedly I had spoken with Ross about this student's negative response to my suggestion, [it was for her own good that she stayed in Pre EAP], but I never thought that Ross would overturn my decision. Effectively what he's done is under cut my professional opinion, and I've been left with the Big Bad Wolf syndrome. And the irony is.....today the same student didn't stop saying, 'I don't understand'. When do I put a student up or leave them where they are? Does it depend on theatrics, whether a student can convince a teacher to promote them?

17-Jul-97

Today we took Industrial Action. We'd been talking with the Independent Education Union rep for a couple of weeks, trying to avoid going out, but considering the appalling offer that was made by our employer we really had no choice. You have to wonder though, if half an hour on strike will really make any type of difference at all? I'm not the only one who went out exclusively for the purpose of supporting the more senior teachers; some of us I imagine must really be questioning the validity of the claim, and/or whether we should have accepted the 9% that was offered over three years.

Another teacher, Constance, asked me today if I thought it was a good idea if we tried to get back the $40 we'd spent on a school competition from the school's petty cash supply. I was dumb founded that she would even ask me!! She's one of those teachers who works so bloody hard, and is seen to be one of the beasts of burden around the place, a characteristic that certain other teachers and even the DOS heartily takes advantage of. If there's ever a new idea to experiment on, some professional development to be involved in or something to be created or organized, Constance is always around to be foisted into the lime-light by someone else. As relatively new teachers, we accept this as a form of 'initiation' which just may assist us in improving the longevity of our positions at UEC.
108: awarded to the group of students, that a school vote would decide as
109: the winner. After near constant haranguing to get the DOS to decide on
110: the form of the prize, it was decided that a couple of UEC T-shirts
111: might be a bit expensive to award as prizes!! At this stage, having
112: waited virtually 4 days for an answer to our request, Constance went
113: out and bought gifts that she thought would be appreciated by the
114: winning team, and runners-up; gifts to the amount of $40. Perhaps a
115: trite, boring story to you this one, but it gets a little saucier!
116:
117: Regarding the aforementioned competition, we'd boosted enthusiasm
118: about the prospect of an award amongst the students involved -another
119: suggestion from admin- to the point we're students had entrusted us to
120: provide half decent prizes. Many students got quite excited at the
121: thought of winning something, and put a commensurate amount of effort
122: into their projects. On graduation day, having been left in the lurch
123: for prizes by Admin, we had to go it alone and literally buy the gifts
124: ourselves to present to the students, THAT DAY. It wasn't surprising
125: that we were in the front line of student disappointment, when the
126: winners were handed some rushed up computer certificates and a small
127: box of chocolates! Thanks Admin, the students probably won't be so
128: gullible next time and trust us to keep our end of the bargain. On the
129: issue of the outstanding $40, Constance placed her receipt on the
130: DOS's desk this afternoon. Watch this space! Friday,
131:
132: July 18, 1997
133: A difficult situation reared it's head today. Students asked me if I
134: would explain the meaning of some of the exclamations I tend to make
135: in Italian. Having lived and worked in Italy for many years, I
136: sometimes accidentally let out the occasional "Porco Dio", or
137: "Madonna" when a student says something funny or completely off the
138: mark. It sometimes leads to a good bout of laughter when Mamma Mia
139: comes out, but students have been curious to find out just what I'm
140: saying. They were relieved I suspect, to find out that I wasn't
141: blaspheming the American rock star but the real 'Madonna', when I
142: slipped up. I got a little more worried when they asked for a
143: translation of 'Dio cane' or 'Gesu christo', but I told them it meant
144: something fairly neutral like My goodness. I began to think about
145: whether that was in fact a suitable thing to do; to tell students lies
146: about another foreign language. Obviously one must be slightly
147: circumspect and sensitive about translating all taboo words. But what
148: became more interesting was that they wanted to discuss Italian for a
149: while [in class today], instead of the usual English stuff. I spent
150: about 10 to 15 minutes discussing and giving examples of various
151: exclamations in Italian, especially chosen not to offend, and at the
152: end of the fun interval, rose above myself in the classroom and
153: wondered what the hell the DOS would say if she'd entered the room at
154: that particular moment.
155:
156: I sometimes think that I'm getting an unapproving glance from some of
157: the senior staff at times; the head teacher made it very obvious that
158: teacher popularity wasn't something that he enjoyed seeing. I wonder
159: if this has something to do with my reaction to the fun we had today?
160: And the question begs; if I'm a trustworthy member of staff in this
161: school, then surely people will honour my ability to know when there
162: has been enough fun in the room, and when it's time to get back to the
22 July, 1997

Another installment in the never-ending story regarding prizes for Students. You should have seen the prizes that were chosen to be awarded to students who contributed to the Trivia Competition!!!

Almost like a backhander when I saw those 'too expensive' T-shirts that we wanted to make use of, being suggested as a good idea by the DOS for her own little competition. [See diary reference 17 July]. In my opinion, I think some zealous members of staff must have been sufficiently enthused by our Art Competition, and decided to pull a stunt of their own. Not a bad idea, but when there are rules for some and rules for others, you begin to think that there's some sort of conspiracy going on. I can't help thinking that I, apart from the other more recent teachers who have come here, am being 'utilized' beyond what any reasonable job description would outline. I keep mentioning Constance and considering how good it would have been for her to be writing one of these diaries too. Both of us have really been working our arses off; to the point that the usually bubbly Constance has been looking more ragged, and yesterday actually threw a sickie. There is an ever-present pressure being applied to us to perform with our particular classes. It started with the friggin Art Project class, and now it continues into the general running of our normal classes.

The pressure being applied manifests itself in the following ways: A student may remark that I marked his/her attendance 'too harshly'; in other words I was being honest about a lack of punctuality, etc. Word gets back to the student's agent, who complains to a member of Admin, Senior teacher, DOS or other approaches me demanding to see my class role. For the sake of keeping things peaceful, I'm asked to be 'lenient' with my marking. What the f--- does that mean? You were telling us, when we started here as new teachers, that the rolls were legal documents, and that it was very important that they were kept diligently!! What the hell do I do in a situation like this one?

I'm totally in the dark regarding my extension studies class this module. There are some really hard bitten Slovaks amongst them, and of course a good share of the immovable Japanese who still refuse to speak. The other major problem is that the class ranges in ability from Intermediate to Advanced, so you can imagine the kind of problems I'm facing. Last week I obviously created a lesson that went well over the heads of most of the intermediate students, but even though it was difficult, there were times when students had time to speak freely [irrespective of the content of the lesson], and still missed the opportunity of using their speaking skills.

In fact, during a class discussion last week while some of the more vocal Northern Europeans were 'having their fill', I couldn't help but notice that the Japanese students just completely shut up; I mean I'm well aware of the cultural differences when it comes to basic communication in the classroom; the way the more diffident,
self-conscious students tend to retreat when 'louder' ones are on their soap boxes, but one wonders sometimes if the silence is really a form of something else other than genuine lack of ability. It's my opinion that many students think that teachers are there in front of them for entertainment purposes; that if they sit there long enough and keep their mouths shut, that somehow the teacher will finally get frustrated enough, stop trying to make them speak, and 'show' them what they SHOULD be doing. I absolutely cringe at that moment when you've just asked a class a reasonably simple question, i.e.- as in a Monday morning warmer: Did you do anything different or more exciting on the weekend? And all you get is that horrific silent treatment! This is something that I particularly despise. Often I can spend a good half hour on the bus in the morning just wondering what the hell I'm going to use to warm up a class, when I can't even warm myself up for the battle of going into the room again, to start another week. Usually I get quite resentful of this realization. I'm rambling here I know, but this is the train of my thought most mornings on the bus: I've got to get them enthused. Even though I've spent most of my weekend indoors because of the rain, I now have to go into the room and initiate something. Yes, I know I'm the teacher, but just for once I'd love someone else to take the initiative. No, this doesn't mean that I'm forsaking my responsibility as instructor. I also have the right to have a shit day, or to have had a bad weekend. Isn't it possible that one of them couldn't just say, "o.k. Steven, sit down and just relax, we'll get on with a light discussion and you can come into the lesson at your own time."? I'd give my right bloody arm! Realising that the aforementioned scenario is a dream, I get on with devising some quick-draw method of firing up the troops. But should this be a dream? Hey, aren't these people 'young adults'? Why can't they initiate something? Have we hand fed these students to the point that they can't even ask a simple, polite question, that isn't necessarily related to the prepositions we were doing? It really begs the question. There tends to be an unspoken acceptance of producing these clever warmers for Adults, who probably consider them baby-ish, and possibly really don't give a stuff.

Having gone over this a bit I tried something different. I entered the room yesterday, announced my abhorrence of Monday mornings, and sat behind a desk awaiting some action from the 12 odd faces I have to entertain everyday. Warmers only go so far; I'm convinced that if teachers made students aware of this anomaly in the first stages of any English lesson, then students wouldn't come into the room with the usual expectations of seeing another morning circus, and therefore forfeiting their contribution to initiating the beginning of the lesson. Perhaps they'd even learn a couple of polite Anglo-Saxon traditions, like starting a conversation about the weather! [Just a quick idea- perhaps I might try a Show and Tell segment next week.]
273: excuse his not being particularly interested in the lesson, as he had
274: a personal problem with a friend. On enquiring about his dilemma, he
275: predictably closed up, and didn't want to speak. I asked him if he'd
276: like to go home, but he declined saying that he was O.K.
277:
278: The rest of the lesson I couldn't help but take into account this
279: guy's emotional state, and I became aware that I was either leaving
280: him out of class activities, or going very easy on him. I suspect the
281: other students knew what I was trying to do but they eventually got
282: frustrated with my 'accommodating' of Jake. Because of his position as
283: Head Korean within the patriarchal system of male students in the
284: class, I think that many of the students saw my behaviour as
285: favoritism. I hope not. It's difficult to know where to go in a
286: situation like this.

288: Thursday, August 07, 1997
289: I've never had a problem with other teachers observing any of my
290: classes, however something has come up that has shaken me just
291: slightly. Last week, the senior teacher in charge of curriculum
292: development approached me to 'offer' her services as an objective
293: observer/advice giver in the realms of classroom management. I agreed
294: to have her observe my class for the first hour on Tuesday morning on
295: the understanding that we would later discuss some the points that I
296: inevitably forget to practice in my classroom; concept checking not
297: the least most forgotten when I get carried away within the
298: intricacies of simply 'teaching'.
299:
300: Whenever I'm observed I try my hardest to relax and just imagine that
301: the teacher is not there. In fact sometimes I've even tried to involve
302: the visiting teacher in the running of the class, or at least get
303: involved in the monitoring of particular students. Of the subsequent
304: feedback, I've been nothing but totally positive and enthusiastic; at
305: least until last week. The objectivity of the senior teacher was
306: always guaranteed to the staff; a senior member who would be available
307: to all staff who felt they would like some advice and/or constructive
308: criticism regarding their abilities and performance as teachers. Not a
309: bad idea! Basically what happened was this; The senior teacher entered
310: my room, stayed 2 hours, which I considered excessive and even stared
311: down one of my students who was being just a little insolent. I
312: thought the idea was that the visiting teacher was to sit, observe and
313: take notes; get involved yes, as is necessary, but only at the request
314: of the teacher. Strangely, I found myself being more than observed. I
315: felt as though the teacher was evaluating me far beyond what could be
316: considered reasonable for the purposes of feedback. During my session
317: of observation, a few of the other teaching staff were peering into
318: my room through the window, giving me little signs of encouragement,
319: winks and expressions of exasperated disbelief that I had to endure 2
320: hours of this treatment. Later, discussing the ordeal with others, I
321: mentioned my feeling of discomfort at being observed so strenuously
322: and for such a long time, and they also advised me that I wasn't the
323: only one to have been pressured into this kind of experience.
324: According to them, it was a common practice of the senior teacher. I
325: can only hope that the observation and the subsequent feedback I
326: received, were kept confidential, and not used in any way to affect
327: the outcome of a possible application for permanency which I'd like to
My final insertion to this diary today. I've just finished a month with an EAPs class, some of whom will continue with me into the next module. Constance and I were also delegated into doing Project Work with 2 classes of lower intermediate students for Extension Studies this month. We've certainly learned our lesson regarding the awarding of prizes to students; that will not be happening again this month. We'll run a vote amongst the classes, but I'll be beggared if any senior teacher will make us give any awards again! Just a little note about what happened today. Rightfully, my new EAPs class complained about the number of students crammed into the room.
1: Early May 1997
2: Told by the head teacher, Vicky, my contract to be changed soon on my
3: one year's completion and to expect an observation next week. I decide
4: on Business. I prefer it and it generally goes with more zing that my
5: usual class.
6:
7: 7/5/97
8: Vicky observes class. I've chosen Marketing and Advertising as the
9: students love the focus on sex in ads and I've collected some good
10: examples. Vicky scribbles throughout, laughs uproariously at my
11: reference to 'ladies, does size matter?' as I hold up various phallic
12: perfume bottles. Later she conducts an evaluation interview in rather
13: a rushed fashion, asking the same questions as in January - any
14: problems? Any suggestions as to how to improve things? Where do I see
15: my future with the college? etc. I have forgotten and wish I'd
16: prepared some suitable answers. I comment about lack of communication
17: between management and teachers, it's all top-down. Teachers have no
18: voice. I mention the photocopier queue, it's rather babyish to
19: remember who's before and after you; and having to change seats with
20: change of level (she retorts 'well, some teachers like it!'). I
21: comment that teachers seem to have been given more and more little
22: things to do which encroach on their time. Re my future, I say I'm
23: happy to go on as I am, I'm willing to try anything, and I
24: particularly like Business English and the thought of developing new
25: options.
26:
27: 9/5/97
28: Vicky gives me feedback on my teaching, generally very good. Says I
29: remind her of herself as a teacher (not sure if this is a compliment
30: but presume so). However, she merely reads her written comments to me
31: in a rushed fashion, no eye contact, no real positivism or conviction,
32: a curiously lacklustre delivery. I think: she hasn't had any training
33: in how to give feedback. I assume everything is therefore OK and do
34: not ask.
35:
36: 15/5/97
37: Four teachers told they won't be needed soon as student numbers down -
38: they are the teachers who were expecting it, the most recent arrivals,
39: Jeff, Anna, Jane, and Elise. Jane is particularly peeved, has been
40: there 5 months, trekking in from M. Laura and I (joined on the same
41: day) think we have no reason to be worried because we've been told
42: about our future contract upgrade.
43:
44: 19/5/97 12.40 pm
45: I'm at the copier (no queue!), and the DOS, Simon, says 'could you
46: come into the office please?' I feel a stab of alarm - at this place,
47: being called into the office is not good. I say, 'In one minute', I
48: catch Laura's eye, I've been summoned! She looks alarmed, she hasn't
49: been. Simon looks polite but shifty. He tells me I won't be needed
50: after 6/6/97 as numbers are down. I am aghast, my thoughts are racing
54: - can I survive 6-7 weeks without work until numbers pick up? I ask,
55: was there anything wrong with my observation? No, very good, we'll
56: give you a reference. But isn't there some tour work coming up? I
57: query. He looks vague, yes, a Thai tour in July... his eye contact is
58: poor and his manner very hesitant. What about Laura's position? I ask,
59: is it secure? Well, no, he replies hesitantly (this makes me feel a
60: bit better). I stagger out of the office and tell Laura (not about
61: her position though) and she is amazed. I tell the other teachers at
62: my table who are shocked. I go to my class at 1 pm in a daze and tell
63: them I have to leave in three weeks. They are concerned and ask what I
64: will do. I muddle through the lesson and gradually it dawns on me that
65: this doesn't add up.
66:
67: 2.45
68:
69: I go into Vicky, by now rather angry. Simon is talking to Lydia in the
70: office. I say to Vicky: why tell me my contract is up for change when
71: all along there was the risk of being laid off? She looks angry and
72: defensive and utters something I will never forget: 'Well, up until
73: the time I observed you, that was the case. But then you gave answers
74: that were different from everybody else's. I feel a germ of alarm
75: spreading. I say something about the policy of last in, first out, she
76: says, oh no, that's not he case. She says I'll have to talk to Simon.
77: I come back when he's free and the door is firmly closed - this is a
78: most ominous sign. I ask, what is all this about? Vicky resumes: your
79: answers were different. You have problems with the organisation, you
80: found the situation in the staffroom puerile. Everyone else talked
81: about teaching problems but you criticised the organisation. I say:
82: but I don't have any problems with teaching! I am growing more
83: incredulous by the minute. I can't believe that I'm hearing. Vicky
84: passes the buck to Simon to continue, which is funny because he
85: doesn't really know me. Simon says nervously looking at Vicky (this
86: man's eye contact is hopeless). 'We perceive you have an attitude
87: problem'. I ask, have I ever not done what was required of me? No, he
88: replies, but sometimes you behaved with bad grace. I can feel the
89: reality of the room and the moment slipping and sliding all over the
90: place, this can't be happening? I ask for an example. He looks at
91: Vicky and says hesitantly, 'When Maria (social organiser) comes into
92: your class, she sometimes feels unwelcome'. My mouth actually drops
93: open. I'm go because Maria feels unwelcome! Somewhere Vicky comments
94: that I question things and tend to be negative. I ask: how long would
95: you have let me believe I was going because of the numbers? She
96: replies: we'd have told you, we knew you would come in here like this!
97:
98: I go back to the substance of the criticisms I made and point out that
99: there isn't much communication between teachers and management, and I
100: feel teachers should have a say. Simon agrees and warbles: oh! yes,
101: it's the teachers' democratic right to speak up about things. My
102: amazement increases further and I reply: but isn't that what I did and
103: look where it got me? He looks as if he has lost the plot and doesn't
104: reply, just looks to Vicky to take it from there. I ask was there
105: anything wrong with my teaching? No, says Simon, but we don't just
106: want good teachers at [name of college], we want people who will
107: support the ethos of the College and roll with change.
108:
I'm now trying to picture my future and ask: where does this leave me regarding relief work, will you use me? Simon looks at Vicky (for inspiration?) and says hesitantly: well, no..... I get more alarmed.

What about another [name of parent organisation] college? I ask. This time a direct 'No'. Suddenly, the bottom is falling out of my world. Within the space of two hours they have moved from laying me off because the numbers are down to dismissal with the bonus of a black ban. The danger of not working again in the industry looms - my brilliant career over in ten months. Somehow, intuitively, I protest: You can't do this! IF you perceived an attitude problem, you should have identified it and nipped it in the bud; sat me down and discussed it, and given me time to shape up or ship out. An attitude can be changed! There is a silence. My last statement hangs in the air. Both Simon and Vicky now look as if they are making up the script as they go along. Simon says: we will take that to management. I feel somehow relieved that there is room for negotiation. I leave.

I find Laura in the kitchen and tell her: I'm going because I have an attitude problem, I gave the wrong answers! There is a hot pressure inside my head, I'm almost in tears, I'm trying to drink a glass of water for no particular reason but it won't go down. Mary comes around the corner to stickleback and Gillian arrives - they have not missed the significance of the closed door. We are discussing this when Vicky arrives, so we all melt away.

I walk to my car in a daze and drive, [place name] flashes by, a blur of carefree tourists, ocean, cafes, seagulls. The previous day my students were watching [news program] about miners being laid of at Q. A burly 50-something union rep said grimly to the camera: there'll be suicides over this. At the time I thought: oh! come on, don't be melodramatic! As I manoeuvre my car into my units, I see this man saying those words and I realise how a person feels when they are 50-something and they are sacked - no future, no identity, just swept aside, nothing. This isn't happening, it's not real. During the evening I still cannot believe it. It is actually five hours before I cry and go to bed in tears.

20/5/97 2 am

I wake up with a start and the first thing I think is: oh God, it's true, I've been sacked. How humiliating! I can't go back to sleep at all.

20/5/97

I gradually tell people or people know. The teachers are shocked and disgusted, whispering in corners. The feeling is 'They've done it again (a la Mary) - they can't get away with it'. In the afternoon Vicky says diffidently that they have written down what was discussed and someone will talk to me about it soon. I find that management is away on some overseas junket so it will have to be Tracy. The next day I'm informed she will see me on Thursday, that's three days from the original shock.

22/5/97 - 2.45 pm

To Tracy's office. No sign of any written statement - doubt one was ever made. She looks at me, says something like: well, how do you want
to handle this? And blow me down, she fixes her gaze on some distant
point of the million-dollar horizon and starts with: 'the numbers are
down, it's very much a numbers business at this time of the year'. I'm
dumbfounded, not again! I stated very firmly: 'I understand the
numbers issue entirely, but we're talking about two quite separate
things here. What about the 'attitude problem'? I explain the only
flimsy example they have given me of this and ask her to give me
something clearer. She looks away and says she can't, I'll have to go
back to Vicky and Simon for that, but talking about that won't get us
anywhere right now (?? Why not?). She burbles on about the opportunity
to get experience elsewhere, this is my first ESL position (What does
this have to do with anything?). I say: what about not being used for
relief work and being unwelcome at another [name of parent
organisation] college? She looks surprised and says hesitantly that I
shouldn't have been told that, and that she would inform Vicky and
Simon to that effect (I think this is news to her). She wanders along,
saying who knows? with a few more years' experience I might return to
[name of college]. I decide to mention me recent stressors I've been
under, I'm not proud; minor surgery in January, worried about a
concern scare; my father's death in early March (only took one day
off for the funeral): and giving up smoking at Easter - all of which
was known to Vicky and Simon. I freely admit I might not have always
been cheerful in the staffroom but I never missed a beat in the
classroom. She acknowledges this in good, reflective, counselling
style (I'll take that on board') - but she isn't going to budge. I
ask: hypothetically, if 50 new students arrived tomorrow, what would
you do with me? She says with hesitation, well, I guess we'd use you,
but at the same time I would encourage you to seek work elsewhere. She
reiterates that I'll be given a telephone reference. (How do I know
what sort? How will I ever know I'll be used for relief?). I realise
she has never at any stage been prepared to really listen and
negotiate. I say: so I've been sacked because Maria feels unwelcome.
She says: I don't want you to feel sacked! Don't feel sacked! I say:
excuse me, but I do feel sacked. I can feel myself starting to lose
control and don't want to look a silly, weak female in front of her.
As we walk out she pats me reassuringly, almost strokes me arm, I walk
out savagely and abruptly, blundering to the lift in tears. Just
before we concluded, a female voice interrupted us on her intercom,
saying 'Tracy, how long will you be? We've got an emergency on our
hands out here'. And I thought: 'Good! And I hope you have many
more!' I stop off at the ladies' to repair my contact lenses which don't take
well to tears. Recommendation: if you want to stay in control at all
times, wear contacts; impossible to cry gracefully! Into the
staffroom, empty except for Laura. She asks: are you OK? I say I'm not
Tell her briefly, that's it, I'm gone. Then she says (dumb and
dumber, Laura): Why are you so upset? I'm so stunned as such as stupid
questions that I stop crying momentarily and snap out: because I
really thought we could discuss this, get some time to sort it out,
whatever this 'attitude' problem was. I realise that's why I hadn't
fallen completely apart before, I was holding out for negotiation. I
drive home in a daze and cry myself to sleep.

23/5/97

547
Excursion day. I awake with a colossal headache, can't lift my head up, eyes all puffy. My students are going with four other classes and needn't depend on my being there so I call E at home at 7 am and she'll look after them. A day's pay lost, and I really wanted to go with them. They're a great bunch. I take any pill that I think will improve the situation, put on my eyemask and earplugs and sleep until lunchtime. The rest of the day I'm a drained zombie. (Tautology?)

Weekend
Trouble coping with reality. I find I can sleep only if it's the weekend. As soon as I wake at 2 am and realise it's a work day - no more sleep. I decide I must behave with as much good grace as possible (no more 'bad grace'!) and work out the two weeks remaining. Really I want to stop right now, but they might use that against me somehow.

Monday
To doctor for sleeping pills and something for my permanent headache. I've never taken a sleeping pill in my life before (another learning curve) and am expecting to go out like a light; to my horror I still wake at 2 but don't seem to care as much.

28/5/97
There are now large holes in my consciousness. I am on automatic pilot. Today I walked all the way from College to my care to find no handbag on my shoulder. panic. Did someone snatch it and I didn't even notice? I walk back. It is on the floor of the staffroom. I have never, ever forgotten my bag before. I consider the symbolism of this: my handbag is my identity, it contains all the possessions that define me, and I lose it.

Today two teachers left (Mika, Bill - Bill is getting out of teaching, I wonder why?). At the farewell lunch, flowers etc. I suddenly think, how will I leave? Will there be flowers shoved at me like Vicky did for Beth? Will I have the courage to give them back? Teachers come to me after lunch and say: you must have felt very awkward.

Friday
I have given up on the sleeping pills and try to sleep when I can. Today after work I rang [regulatory body] to tell them my tale of woe. A very sympathetic lady listens and says: Sandra must see that she can't do this. I feel better, and listened to. I also call the Union; of course, I wasn't in the union, was I? Was going to join when I was more 'permanent'. They advise me I can represent myself in an unfair dismissal case. I tell them that at the recent union meeting teachers felt unable to speak up about an issue because Vicky was present - and now I learn she is not even in the union! What am I uncovering here? What can of worms?

I reflect that really I am quite proud that at the age of 51, going on 52, I have been dismissed for 'attitude'. Move over, rebellious youth.

Friday
I decided to read the Award carefully, as the idea of doing something about this is taking hold. Up to now, I have been numb. Lo and behold, the Award has disappeared! I am forced to ask Vicky where it is, so she knows I'm up to something. Well, if she thought I had attitude,
what can she expect - here it comes, baby. Finally the Award turns up in Peter's brief case; has he been poring over it to see where they went wrong? I gleefully take it home for the weekend.

Weekend

I read the Award from cover to cover and find I was quite correct in what I told them: they have clearly breached the section dealing with disputes. I should have been told if they perceived a problem, and been given 'a suitable and reasonable' time to rectify it. I also discover that since March 12th they have underpaid us!

Final week

There is a curious sense of unreality about work. The students know the real reason I am leaving. I'm not going to bullshit them, there's enough of that going on here. Besides, they're not daft; as one said, the numbers might go down but we'll still need a teachers on Monday morning. Two Czech girls as me for coffee: when I get outside the building, I find about ten current and former students who give me a cheer! Some of my old students from last October are even there. They present me with a silver bracelet. My faith in myself as a teacher is restored - I had well and truly lost it. Felt I couldn't care less if I never taught again. My imminent departure seems to have acted as a catalyst for these students who have lots of grievances about [name of college] anyway. They want to send a petition to the college and I'm really touched; also, a general letter of complaint. I tell them what they choose to do is their business but that I am very pleased at their support.

Amazingly, I have not relapsed with smoking; I have simply become an alcoholic!

Tuesday: Kevin informs me he is taking over my class! (Note - isn't this Vicky's duty?) He is clearly ill as ease in telling me and I'm not surprised - he joined [name of college] three months ago! I go to Vicky and have to ask who is going to take my Business class? She says: William. I have to try very hard indeed not to let my mouth fall open. William has been there on one module. I believe he's one of the recent arrivals who doesn't have a degree, a fact that Maurine was bemoaning. Well, there goes the numbers theory and the last-in/first-out theory. My humiliation is complete and Vicky knows it. I behave this week with impeccable good grace, but it costs me enormously inside. The other teachers are amazed at my successors, and also my fortitude.

One of my students had to consult Vicky today, and she mentioned how shocked and surprised she was that I was leaving. Vicky's answer: unfortunately the numbers are down, and we're very sorry to see her go! Choke, choke. How dare that overgrown Vicky with the limp hair and grating vowels stand and deliver such utter hypocritical crap! My student had to hide her smile.

After work I ring Legal Aid to ask for the name of a solicitor. They give me Robert's name in [place name] and I ring him and discuss unfair dismissal. I know I only have 21 days from the sacking date to lodge this, and my 21 days will expire on Monday [date]. I make an

549
329: appointment to see him next day.

330:

331: Wednesday

332: Vicky asks me if I'm staying to attend the staff meeting which is about developing course material. I think to myself, that would have to be the bloody stupid questions you have ever asked! I exit to the solicitor's, where I find to my dismay that people defined as casuals are excluded from lodging unfair dismissal claims, and the definition of casual has been redefined in the legislation of January 1996 as someone working for up to 52 weeks; previously it was 6 months. Robert and I discuss my teaching and the fact that in practicality it was far from casual, ie not irregular, informal, nor uncertain; he makes some clarifying calls to Industrial Relations and we decide to lodge the claim anyway ($50!). Robert charges the bare minimum, $120 per hour, I decide my next career should be law. I have to write a brief annexure outlining the circumstances of the dismissal which I wish I had more time to do; in the space where the form asks what I want, I tick the box marked 'reinstatement' and 'other', ie some monetary compensation. I do not expect the papers to reach [name of college] for a while. I go home feeling better, I have done something finally and the ball is rolling. The next day I tell people I have taken legal action and the reaction is: about time someone did it to them! I feel an almost savage pleasure in taking them on.

352:

353: Friday - D-Day

354: A totally appropriate date which I will always remember as a definitive moment in my personal war. Robert Taylor and Richard Todd, eat your hearts out! Thank heavens, neither Simon nor Vicky are there, off at some meeting, so I am spared the hypocrisy. Nine or ten teachers go to lunch with Anna and I, we are given flowers and cards. Sadly, since Vicky has signed the card, few felt able to write what they really wanted to on the card (they confirm this), although Nicole has written 'well, we never thought a year ago we would end up like this!' I would have loved to read their real thoughts. Anna and I have missed signing each other's card, so do so at lunch; she writes: 'don't let the bastards get you down - just remember, not every workplace is as dirty as this one'. A strange incident on the way back from lunch; Sandra, obviously back from overseas, is talking to someone outside the college. She gives me a seraphic smile. I am stunned, debate whether to ignore her, then give a bland smile in return.

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371:

372: After my class, I realise I do not know what the etiquette for leaving under my circumstances is. I decide on the utmost civility. I return my key to Vicky and offer my hand. She is clearly nervous and surprised, and shakes hands, wishing me good luck. I walk out thinking, me one, Vicky nil.

377: Have to ring Robert about writing to the College asking them to negotiate so as to avoid even going to conciliation, and to my surprise find that they have already faxed the claim for unfair dismissal the previous day. So Sandra knew about it when she smiled at me. So what did the smile mean? You silly fool? Since I'm legally excluded from claiming at this stage, we don't write the letter;
Robert advises me to wait and see what they do, unfortunately not my style.

Tuesday
Had a peculiarly vacant long weekend, as if I knew it was the beginning of the very long week. Today the horror of the reality starts to sink in a little. I go to the doctor; I've decided to get a certificate so that I don't have to look for work for a week or so for DSS purposes. When it come to it, I do actually feel quite ill, it has all caught up with me. Three weeks of insomnia and headache have taken their toll, plus other symptoms. The doctor explains that the 'holes' in my consciousness, where I just seem to drop out from being me but still function automatically (a bit of a hazard when driving!) are merely signs of stress. He gives me a certificate for two weeks for 'nervous reaction to loss of job'.

Laura rings after work, and in that zany, yahoo style Yankee style squawks 'so how was your first day of freedom?' I am instantly offended and somewhat frosty in my reply. Maybe it's the age difference, but I don't think she has the faintest idea of how this feels. Actually, I don't think anyone has unless it's happened to them.

Thursday
I have coffee with a student (Czech) who has organised the petition. So sweet, it has been signed by a dozen of them, and they wanted to check (no pun intended) the wording for me. I think they have put it most succinctly: 'We would like to express our concern and dismay over her dismissal ... excellent lesson preparation... made us feel very relaxed and comfortable... helped us reached a sound level of English... it therefore seems very strange that your school can afford to lose such an excellent teacher and person such as me'. Got it in a nutshell, that last part. Very strange indeed. What does the College think it is achieving? Protecting future students from my terrible attitude?

Some students have also prepared a letter of specific complaints about their dealing with the college - two have had relatives and friends who attended the College earlier and found it much better then than now. I recommend they do not send the letter until the final student has left in case they make their lives a misery. I also tell them it might be better to send it to [name of parent organisation] in [overseas place name] - no point in complaining to [name of college], it doesn't get you anywhere. I will search out the address as I may also do the same once my legal action is concluded.

15/6/97
I have coffee with another student, Swiss-German. He has already finished at [name of college] and was most dissatisfied. He complained and had an interview with Sandra and Vicky, but as he remarked astutely, 'I didn't every get any feedback on my feedback'. He offers to come with me if I need someone to support me in negotiating with them, which touches me. Very chivalrous.
The College was legally supposed to respond to the papers within 7 days, but so far nothing. I get a notice from The Australian Industrial Relations Commission that the hearing preliminary conciliation hearing has been set down for 11/7/97, the day before my birthday. Happy birthday, me, this will be a memorable one.

24/6/97
the AIRC faxes that the hearing has been cancelled there will now be a callover matter relating solely to the jurisdictional issue (whether as a casual I am entitled to claim). When I see 'Dobson v [name of college]' I get a chill feeling, this is horribly real new. How much is symbolised by that single little 'v'. Battle lines are now drawn.

30/6/97
Waiting for the callover on 2/7/97 is ghastly. I couldn't have been in a job for the life of me, this millstone weights me down so much. Time seems to drag, I feel as if I'm perpetually waiting for something, and something bad at that. Wednesdays are the worst. I ring friends and get only answer machines. Time seems to stop, I reach moments when I absolutely cannot do anything except look out of the window and think of everyone else getting on with their lives, going about their daily business. I have taken up smoking again, this time simply because it fills up time, gives you the impression you are doing something, and I'm allowing myself to do anything that will make me feel better.

2/7/97
The day dawns. Amazingly I slept last night. I toddle off to the city and have a coffee new the Commission. Sandra and Tracy walk in which startles me. I think they deliberately ignore me. They have faxed to Robert a copy of my contract - and they have added dates to make it look like I was contracted to finish on 6/6/97! Of course the dates were not sighted by me. In the foyer of the Commission, I say abruptly to Sandra: I've never seen this before. The hearing takes about 30 minutes. Sandra does not seem to have sought legal advice (or representation) and waffles on about short term contracts and the seasonal nature of the business. She doesn't seem to realise the sole issue under discussion is the nature of the work 'casual'.

She states categorically: Ms Dobson came to the end of her contract, it wasn't dismissal, you Honour. I am appalled. So this is what they are going to insist to their graves? Numbers down, end of contract, not sacked? Their graves can't come soon enough for me. I am actually sworn in to corroborate my statement of service. I wasn't expecting this and my blood pressure goes soaring. I can feel my heart beating so fast in the witness box. I am able to say with some satisfaction re the fudged contract, 'I've never seen it before'. Sandra waffles on about the paperwork belatedly not catching up with me. How anyone could have known on 24/4/97 that I was to terminate on 6/6/97 - in the middle of the module to boot - is beyond me, and I hope that commissioner saw this as the cover-up it was. Generally Robert comes across as very well prepared and researched, and sticking to the legal issues only. Sandra looks a bit silly and has to have things explained to her. Tracy sits like a blob throughout. The commissioner reserves her decision and says she will hand it down the following week.
494:
495: 3/7/97 I have two interviews, one with Mary, who was sacked from [name of college], and one with Malcolm who hired me at [name of college] originally. Irony of ironies! Should we start a club for those who have left [name of college]. At least this takes away my concern about getting a good reference; so far I haven't needed one.

500:
501: 11/7/97 I'm finding out on the grapevine that my suggestions and criticisms re the college are now being acted on. There is now precious little reason left for having got rid of me, if indeed there was any in the first place. So what exactly was all this about - I am mystified. Did I just get Vicky on a bad hair day? (Every day, in my opinion, bitch, bitch). Was she jealous of me? Was I a threat? So did the whole thing, like Topsy, just grow? Until they'd gone so far in their double-talk about falling numbers that they couldn't go back on it? Why is dishonesty so important to them? The amazing thing that TEACHING was never the issue, the most important thing of all. What kind of teacher do they want? Sheep, obviously. 'Go with change' effectively means toe the line, do what you're told. If I employed excellent teachers, I wouldn't care very much about individuality and personality. I'd be prepared to tolerate all sorts of weirdos in the staffroom, anything but sheep. Strength in diversity, that's my outlook.

517:
518: 29/7/97 Still no decision on the case, no more than three weeks. Today I changed my name. I am starting a new life. I have a new job to go to, with someone who listens when I open my mouth. My mother sends me some money from my father's estate so I do have any financial worries. My cheerfulness (two Ts?) soars and I am really happy for the first time in ages. Whatever the bastards do now - and I don't doubt they've got even more nasties up their sleeve - they can't touch me any more. I've found what I had to do to the best of my ability, and I didn't buckle under the pressure. I can be satisfied with and proud of myself.

528:
529: 4/[name of college]/97 When all this started, I kept wondering why?
530: Now I realise that if was all meant to be. I'd been oddly unhappy at the College since [name of parent organisation] started to erode the quality of daily work. So I took two steps backwards in order to make a quantum leap forward, plus I learned a valuable lesson along the way. I have just rung the AIRC; the commissioner still has not made a decision, she is waiting on a memo from within the commission, whatever that means. If the decision is in my favour, I will go on. If not, I will have given the College a run - for my money! Whatever the outcome, I will have won.