THE DYNAMICS OF INDIVIDUAL TEACHER AUTONOMY:

A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' WORK IN A QUEENSLAND SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

Carol Patricia Nicoll
B.A. University of Queensland, 1979
LL.B. University of Queensland, 1982
M.Ed.Admin. University of Queensland, 1992

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Educational Studies

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

November, 1996

©Carol Patricia Nicoll, 1996
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.
ABSTRACT

The emphasis on collegiality and collaboration in the literature on teachers' work and school reform has tended to underplay the significance of teacher autonomy. This thesis explores the dynamics of teachers' understandings and experiences of individual teacher autonomy (as contrasted with collective autonomy) in an independent school in Queensland which promoted itself as a 'teachers' school' with a strong commitment to individual teacher autonomy. The research was a case study which drew on methodological signposts from critical, feminist and traditional ethnography. Intensive fieldwork in the school over five months incorporated the ethnographic techniques of observation, interviews and document analysis.

Teachers at Thornton College understood their experience of individual autonomy at three interrelated levels - in terms of their work in the classroom, their working life in the school, and their voice in the decision-making processes of the school. They felt that they experienced a great deal of individual autonomy at each of these three levels. These understandings and experiences of autonomy were encumbered or enabled by a range of internal and external stakeholder groups. There were also a number of structural influences (community perceptions, market forces, school size, time and bureaucracy) emerging from the economic, social and political structures in Australian society which influenced the experience of autonomy by teachers.

The experience of individual teacher autonomy was constantly shifting, but there were some emergent patterns. Consensus on educational goals and vision, and strong expressions of trust and respect between teachers and stakeholders in the school, characterised the contexts in which teachers felt they experienced high levels of autonomy in their work. The demand for accountability and desire for relatedness motivated stakeholders and structural forces to influence teacher autonomy. Some significant gaps emerged between the rhetoric of a commitment to individual teacher autonomy and decision-making practices in the school, that gave ultimate power to the co-principals. Despite the rhetoric and promotion of non-hierarchical structures and collaborative decision-making processes, many teachers perceived that their experience of individual autonomy remained subject to the exercise of 'partial democracy' by school leaders.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii  
Table of Contents iii  
List of Tables and Figures vi  
Acknowledgement vii  

INTRODUCTION 1  

Chapter One  Teacher Autonomy  
1. Autonomy as an occupational construct 6  
2. Autonomy in teaching 13  

Chapter Two  Methodological Framework  
1. Understandings of ethnography 22  
2. Who am I? 29  
3. Focus questions 32  
4. Selection and access issues 33  
5. Field work 44  
6. Analysis of data 69  
7. Reciprocity and respondent feedback 71  

Chapter Three  Thornton College  
1. The founding of Thornton 80  
2. A walk through the school 85  
3. Profile of Thornton's teachers 91  
4. A teachers' school 100  
5. 'The Thornton way' 104  
6. Philosophy in practice  
   (i) Enrolment policy and fees 128  
   (ii) Anglican School 130  
   (iii) Coeducational 133  
   (iv) Noncompetitive sport 134  
   (v) Outdoor education 138  
   (vi) Student leadership 140  

Chapter Four  Teacher Understandings of Autonomy  
1. Work in the classroom 144  
   (i) Control of subject content 145  
   (ii) Teaching approach 150  
   (iii) Discipline of students 153  
   (iv) Budgetary control 157
2. Life in the school
   (i) Choice of school 161
   (ii) Dress 163
   (iii) Freedom of movement in and out of school 166
   (iv) Leave provisions 168
   (v) Availability of a staff crèche 171
   (vi) Part-time teachers 177
   (vii) Professional development opportunities 181
   (viii) Freedom to be yourself 187

3. Voice in decision-making processes
   (i) Individual consultation 191
   (ii) Teacher Meetings 197
   (iii) Collegial Groups 204
   (iv) Committees 213
   (v) School Council 218
   (vi) Professional journal 227

Chapter Five Internal Stakeholder Influences
1. School leaders
   (i) Senior administrators 232
   (ii) Middle management 259
2. Colleagues 262
3. Students 266
4. Parents 268

Chapter Six External Stakeholder Influences
1. Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 279
2. The Union 284
3. Occupational stakeholders 290

Chapter Seven Structural Influences
1. Community perceptions of teachers 296
2. Market forces 299
3. School size 303
4. Time 307
5. Bureaucracy 316

Chapter Eight The Dynamics of Individual Teacher Autonomy
1. Foundations for teacher autonomy 321
2. Motivational factors 324
3. Locations of power 331

Notes 338

References 345
| Appendix A | The Queensland Educational Context | 364 |
| Appendix B | Introductory Letter to Thornton Staff | 367 |
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Profile of Thornton teaching staff, 1995 86

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Dynamics of Individual Teacher Autonomy 321 a
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In choosing to pursue doctoral studies at a Canadian university rather than an Australian one, I was faced with the challenges of settling into a new country as well as a new graduate program and new city. I owe thanks to the many friends I made in Vancouver who made me feel welcome and sustained me through the good and the difficult days - in particular, Kandis McLaughlin, Meira Shem Tov, Gwen Chapman and M.E. Kish. I was encouraged to venture overseas by Gwenna Moss and Marie Dunn, whose regular phone calls of support and friendship during my time at UBC, gave me a sense that I really had ‘family’ quite close by, even if they were ringing from Saskatoon.

I wish to thank my committee - Jane Gaskell, Deirdre Kelly and Leslie Roman - for their warmth, expertise and preparedness to share from their extensive experience and knowledge. I particularly thank Jane Gaskell for her generous supervision of my work, her confidence in my ability to finish an ocean away, and her special aptitude for supervision via email.

To the administrators and other staff at Thornton College, I owe much gratitude for sharing their school and their lives with such openness and honesty. Their generosity of time and spirit made the collection of data a much easier task than it might have been.

I thank my family and friends for their support. In particular, my grandmothers - Dorothy and Elizabeth, aunts May and Ann, my friends Andrea Webb and Glenice Watson, and my unfailingly loving and supportive parents, Dorothy and Peter. To Georgina - thanks for everything.
INTRODUCTION

This is a single case study of an independent co-educational school in Brisbane, Queensland, which explored teachers’ understandings and experiences of individual autonomy in their work.

Thornton College* presented a context situated in specific historical, social and economic conditions, and proved to be a fertile research site for exploring teacher autonomy. This school is unique in the Australian educational context for many reasons, not the least of which is that it was identified by its founders as a ‘teachers’ school’. It was established in 1987 by a group of experienced teachers who organised their school around clear philosophical principles. Included among these foundation principles was a belief that an effective education for students would only be created in a school community that valued and respected teachers and their work. Numerous implications arise from this basic premise in terms of the organisation and culture of the school, and teachers’ understandings and experience of individual autonomy.

The study’s focus on teacher autonomy grew out of an interest in the sociology of teachers, and in particular, the ways in which teachers’ roles and responsibilities are positioned within shifting ideological and discursive frameworks. Teachers’ perceptions of their own work are integral to developing understandings of these frameworks and the particular sets of power relations that circulate within and around schools. Thus, this study draws heavily on the

* The school’s administrators reserved the right to decide whether the school’s real name would be used. After reading a draft they chose to have a pseudonym used throughout the study.
voices of teachers and their own explanations of the particular context and conditions in which they work, but I then critically position these explanations within the relations of power I observed in the school.

It emerged that teachers at Thornton understood their experience of individual autonomy at three levels - in terms of their work in the classroom, their working life in the school, and their voice in the decision-making processes of the school. These understandings and experiences of autonomy were encumbered or enabled by a number of influences. There were influences exerted by a range of internal and external stakeholder groups. There were also a number of structural influences that were not exercised by individuals, groups of people or organisations, but by forces that circulate as a result of the economic and social structures of Australian society or the particular structures of the school. The exercise of influence by these various stakeholders or forces was found to result from two motivating factors - the demand for accountability and the desire for relatedness. In some cases both factors contributed to the exercise of influences over teacher autonomy. The perception of strong experiences of individual autonomy by teachers at Thornton was connected to a consensus on the educational vision of the school, and the development of relationships in the school community based on trust and respect.

The study begins with an exploration of notions of occupational autonomy as they have been understood in the sociological literature about professions and teaching. I reject the exclusivity of autonomy as the preserve of the traditional professions and argue that some degree of occupational autonomy is a necessary and worthwhile characteristic of all work.
Autonomy in teaching has been long linked to the pursuit of professional status for the occupation. I argue that such a rationale for occupational autonomy is spurious, and look to broader notions of autonomy in work as a framework for its justification in the work of teachers.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodological framework adopted in this study. Ethnographic approaches were used to explore the ways in which teachers at Thornton understood and experienced autonomy in their working lives. The purely descriptive tendencies of much ethnographic work were rejected in favour of the methodological signposts provided by critical and feminist ethnography. I trace the ethnographic process as I experienced it, and reflect on a number of methodological issues that emerged from the field work.

Chapter 3 positions Thornton College as a school operating within a particular historical, social and philosophical context. Background to Thornton’s position as an independent school in Queensland is provided in Appendix A, which outlines the broader Queensland educational context. I begin in Chapter 3 with a description of the school as I experienced it on a walk around the buildings and grounds. An outline of the origins of the school follows. A profile of Thornton’s teachers positions them as a group within a broader occupational context. Thornton’s development as a ‘teachers’ school’, and the strength of a notion of the Thornton way of doing things, are then explored, to develop understandings of teachers as workers in this particular school context. The philosophical principles on which the school was founded are discussed, as is a selection of the policies and practices that enact these commitments.

Chapter 4 maps teacher understandings of individual autonomy. What emerges is that teachers
understand individual autonomy at three levels - in terms of their work in the classroom; their working life in the school; and their capacity to have a voice in the decision-making processes in the school. The rich data that emerged supports the conclusion that this was a school where teachers perceived that they experienced a relatively high level of individual autonomy. Critical analysis reveals that they did not play out these experiences without tensions and contestation.

The teachers’ experiences of individual autonomy were influenced by a number of stakeholders in the educational community in which Thornton is positioned. Chapter 5 explores the nature of the influence of internal stakeholders such as school leaders, colleagues, students and parents, upon individual teacher autonomy at Thornton. Chapter 6 frames teacher autonomy at Thornton within the influence of a number of external stakeholders, including the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies and the union. Chapter 7 discusses the nature of the influence exerted by a number of structural forces upon teacher autonomy. Included in this discussion are the influence of the social and political climate, market forces, the size of the school, time and the size of the bureaucracy in the school.

The final chapter examines the dynamics of the framework of influences on individual teacher autonomy. A consensus of educational vision, and trust and respect between stakeholders, are shown to underpin relationships within the school community that fostered individual teacher autonomy. Two reasons emerged as motivations for the exercise of the range of influences upon individual teacher autonomy. These factors were a demand for accountability from teachers, and/or a desire for relatedness with teachers. They are shown to operate both
independently and in combination, as motivations for the exercise of enabling or encumbering influence upon individual teacher autonomy. A critical analysis of the relationships of power embedded in teachers' experiences of individual autonomy at Thornton concludes the study.
CHAPTER ONE TEACHER AUTONOMY

The concept of autonomy has been explored in a range of scholarly discourses, including philosophical considerations about human nature and rights, political theory about state and ethnic sovereignty and the sociology of occupations and work. This chapter will position autonomy as a sociological concept in work and occupations, with a particular focus on teaching.

1. Autonomy as an occupational construct

Autonomy: Right of self government; personal freedom; freedom of the will (in Kantian doctrine); a self-governing community. (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1964)

Autonomy as a notion of personal freedom, has been heralded by classical and liberal philosophers as a positive attribute or quality, one which is worth striving for and worth protecting when achieved. Within this framework, autonomy has been reified to become a core defining characteristic of 'the individual' and an integral element of the conception of human nature (see for example Kant (in Mulhall & Swift, 1992), Rawls, 1972). The centrality of autonomy has been and remains contested territory, however, as communitarian philosophers (Mulhall & Swift, 1992; Norman, 1995, Raz, 1986), feminist theorists (Gilligan, 1982; Jaggar, 1988; Jones, 1993) and postmodernists (Child et al, 1995; Levinas, 1987) have challenged the priority and universality attributed to individual freedom. Notions of dependence, interdependence, the importance of the 'common good' and the significance of disruptions and disturbances in constructions of autonomy, emerge from these critiques in attempts to refashion the significance and role of individual autonomy.
The tension between the individual's right to exercise control over her or his own life and the community's need to exercise control over the individual is played out in the degree of autonomy enjoyed by an individual as a worker. Autonomy has come to be seen as a valued and worthwhile goal in most occupations, although arguably in different degrees depending upon the occupation. The extent to which a worker can control the terms and conditions of his or her work is used as an indication of the level of individual autonomy awarded to that worker, and often as an indication of the social status ascribed to that occupation (greater autonomy being equated with greater occupational status). The degree to which an occupational group can control entry to their occupation and the development of and vision for that occupation, is seen as a measure of the collective autonomy enjoyed by the occupation, and again often flags occupational status. In this sense, autonomy can be seen as a central dynamic of all occupations, and a fundamental influence on the way any worker will understand her or his work.

Autonomy for a worker can not be viewed or analysed as a simply quantifiable construct. It is rather a relative and fluid characteristic which is woven into a complex web of influences on and around the worker, including gender, class, race, ethnicity, age or sexuality. Nash (1966) notes that "the drive towards autonomy is complicated further by the fact that it is rarely a "pure" drive but is more usually part of an ambivalent mixture of feelings of dependence and independence" (p.148). Constructions of autonomy and associated concepts such as accountability, authority, independence, control and power, are clearly fraught with the complexity of conflicting power relations within particular institutional contexts. Just as occupational autonomy is not a simple, absolute construct, neither is teacher autonomy. It is a concept which is framed within shifting ideological and material contexts, as will be shown in this case study.
As suggested earlier, there are two ways in which autonomy has been construed in a work context - in an individual sense, pertaining to the individual worker, and in a manifestation for the group or the occupation as a collective. In the case of teaching, the individual teacher’s autonomy may be studied in classroom and school interactions. Autonomy for the classroom teacher can be couched in terms of independence or control with respect to a number of areas of teachers’ work, for example: in the way teachers are allocated to teach particular subjects in designated schools; in the design and implementation of curriculum; in the discipline of students; in the adoption of particular pedagogical approaches; and in the way that evaluation of teacher performance is conducted. The way teachers experience these constructs of their work will be crucial to their perception of autonomy and it is these understandings and experiences of occupational autonomy which are the focus of this case study.

Notions of ‘collective autonomy’ refer to the level of control an occupation may exercise over their work and occupation as a group in terms of regulation, entry, and training. Teachers have historically lacked the collective autonomy enjoyed by professions such as law, medicine, or engineering and their representative bodies. Such professions are conventionally portrayed as possessing a high level of collective autonomy, and enjoy a freedom from external interference in matters concerning professional regulation (although there have been significant challenges to this: See Dreeben, 1970, p.68; Goss, 1961, p.49; Mills, 1953). The College of Teachers in British Columbia is possibly one of the only attempts to “put control of teacher certification, discipline and professional development in the hands of the profession” (Sheehan & Wilson, 1994, p.13), although the Board of Teacher Registration in Queensland goes some way toward meeting those goals.
Collective autonomy can also refer to the broader control workers in an occupation have over policy and practice in their occupational area. Dale (1981) calls this a “strong” conception of autonomy, meaning in relation to teachers, the “creation...and execution of educational programmes...on the basis that teachers are the experts about education and that they alone, or they best, can decide what should be taught as well as how to teach it” (p.313). Evidence of teachers’ collective influence upon educational policy in the state of Queensland or nationally would satisfy Dale’s ‘stronger’ conception of autonomy. The various collective manifestations of occupational autonomy are not the focus of this case study and they will only be mentioned briefly in chapter 6.

As an attribute of a worker or an occupation, autonomy was once most commonly associated with the ‘professions’. In Bledstein’s (1976) historical study of the “the culture of professionalism” in nineteenth century American society, he develops a definition of professionalism which includes a notion of autonomy. He traces such autonomy as a manifestation of American democratic idealism. He argues that the culture of professionalism “emancipated the active ego of a sovereign person as he [sic] performed organized activities within comprehensive spaces” (p.87). This self-governing person operated to “achieve a level of autonomous individualism, a position of unchallenged authority heretofore unknown in American life” (p.87).

Etzioni explains in his introduction to The semi-professions and their organizations (1969), that the occupations described as “semi-professions” (which included teaching) had less autonomy than “real” professions:

...professional work here has less autonomy; that is, it is more controlled by those higher in ranks and less subject to the discretion of the professional than in full-fledged
professional organizations, though it is still characterized by greater autonomy than blue-or white-collar work. (p.xiii)

In a study of British teachers, Leigh (1979) nominates a number of traits in his definition of a profession, two of which relate to autonomy. The first is a focus on the individual, where "a professional worker is occupationally autonomous and completely responsible for all matters arising from his [sic] professional judgement" (p.33). The second trait identifies a notion of collective autonomy, whereby "a professional occupational group is occupationally autonomous" (p.33).

A large part of the claim for the distinctiveness and exclusivity of the professions, has been based on the presumption that the professional worker has the right to control his or her own work. Freidson (1971), argues that autonomous self-control is the defining characteristic of a profession. In part, these claims rest on the specialised knowledge seen to be possessed by a member of a profession, and the corresponding right to independence from the intervention of those who do not possess such a body of knowledge.

Occupational autonomy is no longer the exclusive 'right' of members of the traditional professions. A number of challenges have been made to the exclusive claims of members of the so-called professions to autonomy in their work. Firstly, the portrayal of professionals as workers enjoying a high level of autonomy is somewhat questionable in light of the realities of greater accountability and external surveillance of all workers in the community. As so many professionals in the Australian context are in fact employees of the state, rather than self-employed, the claim to greater autonomy than that available to other state employees is also debatable (see Dreeben, 1970, p.19; Glazer, 1991).
Feminist challenges to notions of profession and professionalism add to the argument that occupational autonomy should be no longer the sacred preserve of the professions. A growing body of feminist literature has posited challenges to masculinist constructions of connected concepts such as profession, professionalism, authority, control, power, independence and autonomy (Acker, 1990b; Biklen, 1987; Laird, 1988; Murray, 1992; Noddings, 1990; Tabakin & Densmore, 1986). Glazer (1991) notes in her review of feminist perspectives in the sociology of the professions, that “although professionals can no longer be characterized as autonomous practitioners in a free market society, the continued vigour of the professions can be attributed to a belief system rooted in masculine concepts of status, exclusivity, individualism and power” (p.324). Glazer concludes that from a feminist perspective the pursuit of professionalism produces an inevitable conflict between autonomy and hierarchy, which she sees as incompatible concepts. She calls for a policy agenda which restructures “the public and private spheres of human existence to be more responsive to women’s concerns and to build nonbureaucratic, nonhierarchical systems” (p.338).

A strong case can also be put for the argument that popular notions of profession and professional, have changed so significantly in western societies in the latter part of this century, that they have rendered claims for exclusivity by the traditional professions meaningless. A brief survey of magazines or television advertisements will reveal that ‘profession’ and ‘professional’ are used today in reference to workers in almost every occupation.

In its broadest common usage, professionalism has come to mean simply ‘doing a good job’. This point was made in an editorial in the Australian educational journal, Unicorn (1982):
'Professional' is often used, in a popular sense to signify being good at one’s job, whatever that job may be, and this is as useful a meaning for teaching as any. This could signify that teachers are well educated and well trained, that they keep up to date, that they are conscientious and effective in their work, and that they like young people and have a sense of responsibility to them and their parents, and that they are ready to cooperate with other teachers to make schools into effective institutions.

This view is borne out by a closer analysis of the popular usages of the terms profession and professional. Whether these words are being used in relation to a salesperson, hairdresser or doctor, they are being associated with characteristics such as efficient and caring service for clients, appropriate levels of training or preparation for the service provider, and the provision of products or service with some degree of guarantee or accountability from the provider. These characteristics are no longer treated as the hallowed territory of the traditional professions. They are now considered worthy goals for all workers.

The corollary of this conclusion is that many of the occupational qualities once confined to the traditional professions are no longer theirs alone. The drive for ‘credentialism’ in all occupations and the establishment of occupational associations devoted to development and advancement of individuals and the occupation, are features that now form the foundation of many occupations in Australian society, not merely the professions. The repositioning of autonomy as a broad-based occupational value has been supported by claims in much of the popular management literature of the past two decades. Peters and Waterman (1984), for example, argue in their book *In Search of Excellence*, that where a worker is given “even a modicum of apparent control over his or her destiny”, the result is a high commitment to work and high productivity levels (p.xxiii). They provide examples of successful companies which encourage their workers to develop autonomy and entrepreneurship in their working lives as administrators “push” some level of decision-making down to the shop floor (p.200).
These trends can not be read, however, as an indication that all workers now enjoy high levels of autonomy in their work. There is evidence, for example, that the impact of automation and new technologies has resulted in a ‘deskilling’ of many workers, particularly women, minority groups and people in lower paid jobs, with a concomitant reduction in working conditions and relative pay rates (Braverman, 1974, Pringle, 1988). This perspective will be discussed in the next section in relation to the ‘proletarianisation’ of teachers.

Occupational autonomy, in both its manifestations at the individual and collective level, is clearly no longer the exclusive right of members of traditional professions. It has become a characteristic of work which should be experienced to some degree by all workers.

2. Autonomy in teaching

Occupational autonomy for teachers is a concept which has become linked to a continuing preoccupation with the ‘professionalisation’ of teaching. Autonomy is an important concept for teachers, but I resist the claim that such autonomy should derive from teaching’s status as a profession. Some background to the debate about teaching as a profession is necessary to substantiate this rejection.

Teachers are an occupational group which has been much troubled by pursuit of status as a profession. As long ago as 1932, Willard Waller was speculating about the reasons for what he described as the “low social standing of the teaching profession” and the push by some educators at that time to turn teaching into a “real profession” (p.64). Waller rejected such a call, recommending instead that teachers should leave teaching for a period and “mingle with his
fellow men [sic] as an equal” so that they could broaden their “narrow social and intellectual training” (p.64).

The debate has continued with some scholars arguing that teachers are professionals (Boyer, 1983, p.185; Langford, 1978, p.53), and others supporting the more common interpretation which is that teaching is not a profession according to the structural functionalist definitions or ideal-types (Hughes, 1971; Mills, 1953; Parsons, 1954). Teaching, like nursing and several other traditionally female dominated occupations, has been relegated to status as a ‘wannabe’ in the stakes for recognition as a profession (Etzioni, 1969; Hughes, 1971; Leggatt, 1970; Leigh, 1979). Berg (1983) highlights the ambiguous ‘professionalism’ of teachers in his observation that there is “fairly general consensus that teachers cannot be regarded as professionals in the sense that, for instance, doctors and lawyers can. However, most writers believe that teaching involves some elements of professionalism” (p.177).

Teaching has been perceived to fail to measure up to the criteria for a profession on several grounds. Almost thirty years ago, Etzioni (1969) summarised teaching’s apparent ‘shortcomings’:

Their training is shorter, their status is less legitimated, their right to privileged communication is less established, there is less of a specialized body of knowledge, and they have less autonomy from supervision or societal control than “the” professions. (p.v)

Whereas most of these claims would now be challenged, the question of the existence of a shared body of specialised knowledge in teaching has continued to attract scholarly attention. A number of writers who have supported the notion of teaching as a profession have concluded that teachers have yet to develop such a theoretical foundation for their work (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p.155; Darling-Hammond, 1986; Dreeben, 1970, p.207; Goodlad, 1984, p.269; Langford,
Some educators have circumvented their perceptions of teaching's 'shortcomings' as a profession, by constructing the occupation as a "semi-profession" (Etzioni, 1969) and "quasi-profession" (Hughes, 1971). These perspectives serve to position teachers within a deficit framework. Such interpretations force teachers to play 'catch up' to the mores and values of other occupations, when a more productive effort could be invested in positively framing teachers' occupational reflections within the realities of their own experiences and work context.

To advocate such a framework is not to dismiss the reality of teachers' material working conditions which may mitigate against developing a more contextualised and positive occupational identity. Dale (1981), for example, argues that teacher autonomy is "situated", in that their freedom to carry out their work in their own way is relative, restricted to their own classrooms, and likely to vary from school to school (p.312) (see also Hatton, 1985). Pursuing a similar theme is Nias (1989), who observes that teachers possess only a "bounded professionalism", without the full complement of rights or conditions of work which professionalism traditionally denotes.

Teaching's lack of status as a profession has been a recurring concern amongst educational scholars over the past fifty years, but the concern reached fever pitch during the scrutiny of the occupation by numerous educational reform reports published in the United States in the early 1980s. Reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the Report of the Reagan Administration's National Commission on Excellence in Education; the Carnegie Forum on Education's report, *A*...
Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century (1986); and the Holmes Group report, Tomorrow's Teachers (1986); struck up cries of an alleged 'crisis in teaching' and pointed much of the blame at teachers and the occupation's lack of professional status. In Australia, a similar rash of reports in the late eighties and early nineties heralded renewed interest in the problems teaching faced as an occupation (Board of Teacher Education, Queensland, 1987; Crowther, 1991; Dawkins, 1988; Schools Council, 1989 & 1990).

In addition to these formal reports were a number of studies conducted by individuals and small groups of academics into the state of education in the United States. These studies ultimately spawned a virtual education industry which has come to be known as the 'effective schools' literature. These studies highlighted the symbiotic relationship between effective schools and teachers and the presence of high levels of teacher autonomy. In her study of the "good high school", part of which was included in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching study of secondary education in the United States, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) observes that:

...we also discover that good high schools offer teachers the opportunity for autonomous expression, a wide angle on organizational participation and responsibility, and a degree of protection from the distorted social stereotypes that plague their profession. (p.25)

She posits the notion of "autonomous expression" as a positive and enriching opportunity for teachers. In other publications emerging from the Carnegie study, Boyer (1983) and Perrone et al (1985) focused on teaching as a profession. Boyer recommended that it was necessary to "strengthen the profession of teaching in America" (p.7); and Perrone et al (1985) argued that "teachers need a stronger sense of professionalism" (p.655). In his study of American high schools, Sizer (1985) discusses the "crisis" in confidence among American teachers and arrives at an analysis which equates autonomy with professionalism:
Our culture signals respect in at least three ways. We give people autonomy: we say, We trust you enough to solve this problem not only for yourself, but for us all. In the world of work, we dub this autonomy ‘professionalism’. (p.183)

These scholars identified autonomy as one essential step toward a sort of ‘holy grail’ for teachers - their pursuit of status and respect in the community.

Challenges to the claims and responses of the reform reports flooded the educational literature, as scholars from a variety of ideological standpoints in both North America and Australia, critiqued the diagnosis and cures posited by these educational reformers. Powell, Farrar and Cohen (1985) argue that in many respects the proposals emanating from these reform reports were “profoundly misdirected” (p.302) and would merely reinforce many of the limitations of the existing system of education. Freedman (1990) criticises the underlying assumptions of the education reform reports produced in the United States during the 1980s. She has a particular concern with their use of the concept of autonomy and argues that “autonomy, uncritically defined in these reports as positive, is mythologized as a natural attribute of professionalism” (p.252). This is a presumption which she strongly rejects. Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) write of a “rhetoric of crisis” being generated by these reports, and criticise the way in which teachers had been:

...treated more like uninformed hired hands than professionals to whom we entrust our most precious asset...Their voices have not and still do not inform the actions taken to rectify what reformers believe to be the matter with education in the United States. (p.xvi)

Many of the critics of the reform reports have taken exception to the values and meanings embedded in the moves to ‘professionalize’ teachers’ work, and have challenged the imperatives from these reports driving teaching to become a profession. An alternative prognosis of the state of the occupation emerges from the deliberations of these critics in both North America and Australia. They argue that teachers are being deprofessionalized, deskilled or proletarianized as an
occupational group (Apple, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Casey, 1993; Connors, 1989; Fawns, 1994; Harris, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994; Lawn & Grace, 1987; Ozga & Lawn, 1981; Smyth, 1991). Lawn & Grace (1987) summarise these critiques by arguing that “professionalism is not an innocent, non-political occupational concept. It is deeply implicated in the politics of teachers’ work and in the wider politics of teacher-state relations” (p.x).

Somewhat paradoxically, the recommended solutions offered by many of the reports and studies, when translated into state policy, appear to have moved teachers further away from the norms and mores of the traditional professions. State authorities across the United States responded to diagnoses of a deep-seated malaise in the teaching occupation by introducing stricter accountability measures such as standardized testing, and strategies to achieve closer supervision of the work of teachers.

Michael Apple’s (1986) critique of the reform reports focused on their “proposals to rationalize and standardize the work of teachers and the curriculum”, which he interpreted as part of the longer history of the “state’s attempt to control the labor process not just of its workers in general but tacitly of women workers in particular” (p.144). In the preface to Kathleen Casey’s life histories of women teachers, Apple targets the lack of teacher voice on the report committees:

   Even though many of the recent spate of national reports on education in the United States had a few teacher representatives involved, by and large the voices of teachers have been largely silenced. Even more difficult to hear have been the voices of politically active teachers. (Apple in Casey, 1993, p.xii)

These concerns have also been articulated in ‘intensification theory’, which points to such an increase in the intensification of the work of teachers, that they are losing control of their working lives. Hargreaves (1994) writes of a:
...bureaucratically driven escalation of pressures, expectations and controls concerning what teachers do and how much they should do within the school day. Much of that somewhat self-defeating process of intensification comes from the discrepant time perspectives and understandings that are embodied in the sharp and widening divisions between administration and teaching, planning and execution, development and implementation. (p.108)

Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) argue that teachers are experiencing “structural shock” as a result of a diminution of authority and autonomy in their work (p.142). They suggest that although teachers have acquired some of the “accoutrements of professional status”, they have simultaneously lost some of the “traditionally high level of authority and autonomy they have exercised in classroom decision-making” (p.142).

The continuing tension between those who argue that teachers should look to the attributes and status of a ‘profession’ as their ideal and those who reject such moves, should not be used to reject autonomy as a valuable characteristic of teaching as an occupation. There are strong arguments from both sides of the debate which support high levels of teacher autonomy, whether it be construed as a necessary prerequisite for professional status, or as I would prefer to position it, as an appropriate and worthy goal for teachers as workers. Calls for the latter are hardly new, as evidenced by a speech given by Margaret Haly, a labor leader from the United States, early this century. In her impassioned speech to the General Session of the National Education Association in 1904, she implored teachers to organize to improve their working conditions, arguing that:

The teacher [is] an automaton, a mere factory hand, whose duty it is to carry out mechanically and unquestioningly the ideas and orders of those clothed with the authority of position...The individuality of the teacher and her power of initiative are thus destroyed, and the result is courses of study, regulations, and equipment which the teachers have had no voice in selecting, which often have no relation to the children's needs, and which prove a hindrance instead of a help in teaching. (Hoffman, 1981, p. 214)
A variety of practices showing the "individuality of the teacher" and the power of her or his initiative are shown in this study of Thornton College.

This case study aims to fill several gaps in the literature about teacher autonomy. Firstly, although numerous studies make mention of teacher autonomy, it is usually as a peripheral issue addressed in the course of the examination of other foci, for example, as one element of a broader examination of teachers' work (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; Lortie, 1975); or as part of a study with an emphasis on educational administration and organization (Johnson, 1992; Street, 1989; Welch, 1991). This case study focuses directly on teacher understandings of their individual autonomy. Secondly, the existing literature has been largely founded on studies in North American or British schools and as Huberman (1993, p.34) points out, cultural differences in schooling may play an important part in understanding teachers' meanings for particular elements of their role and identity.

Finally, several studies have found that it is in their classrooms that teachers experience the highest degree of autonomy in their working lives (Dreeben, 1970, p.47; Sclan, 1993). In his study of 38 schools and 1,350 teachers across the United States, Goodlad (1984) concluded that "the teacher is virtually autonomous with respect to classroom decisions - selecting materials, determining class organization, choosing instructional procedures, and so on" (p.123). I sought to explore whether teachers in a Queensland school enjoyed such high levels of autonomy in their classrooms, and whether their understandings of autonomy were similarly focused upon their work in the classroom.
Chapter summary

Occupational autonomy for individual workers has come to be generally applauded. Some feminist scholars, do however, express reservations about concepts of autonomy for workers, in particular in relation to the impact of autonomy on collaborative and collegial work practices. In both its collective and individual forms, autonomy has traditionally been preserved as a characteristic of the work of members of the traditional professions, but this exclusivity has been eroded by popular notions of professionalism and demands for increased accountability from all workers, including those in the traditional professions. For teachers, autonomy has been most usually linked with the struggle for professional status. It is, however, more appropriately framed by an inclusive understanding of occupational autonomy, which extends to the work of all people. Teachers’ understandings and experience of individual autonomy are contextual and limited, as this study will show.
CHAPTER TWO  METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Understandings of ethnography

This case study of a Queensland independent school focuses on teacher autonomy, using as a methodological framework the ethnographic techniques of observation, interviews, and document analysis.

In the lengthy process leading up to entry to a field site, I drew on a broad range of literature to position my research. Three theoretical frameworks which are interconnected in their theoretical roots and practical applications, particularly influenced the way I ultimately designed and conducted the research - ethnography, critical ethnography and feminist theory and practice. The methodological approach which I adopted is therefore a hybrid in nature, with particular aspects of each of these traditions being drawn upon at different times, to allow an inquiry which was contextualised and constantly evolving.

I came to my research with a philosophical and political commitment as a feminist. The theoretical and practical implications of this commitment are difficult to isolate because they permeate my work at every level. Some may argue that my research is not ‘feminist research’ because although it is research by a woman, it is not exclusively on women and I do not see it as being especially for women. I did not choose a research question which dealt with ‘obvious’ feminist issues, although where I perceived it to be relevant and appropriate during the research, I followed a course of inquiry and analysis which could be described as feminist. I did not pursue an ethnographic approach because of a belief that it was ‘particularly appropriate to feminist
research” (Stacey, 1988, p.112). Like Stacey, I was wary of the potential for intrusion and manipulation by the researcher in ethnographic work, whether she espoused a feminist consciousness or not (p.113). Ultimately, I concur with Stacey’s conclusion that it is not possible to have a “fully feminist ethnography (but) there can be...ethnographies that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives” (p.117). My goal was for this study to be such an account.

In understanding the ethnographic approach I have taken in this study, it is necessary to delineate ‘traditional’ or ‘naturalistic’ ethnography from the more recently evolving ‘critical’ or ‘postmodern’ or ‘poststructuralist’ approaches to ethnography. Operating from firmly within the naturalistic framework, Malinowski (1922) posited the ultimate goal of the ethnographer as to “grasp the native’s point of view, his [sic] relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (p.25). Lederman (1990) described ethnography as aiming to “enable one’s audience to understand something of interest about a corner of the world they have not experienced directly themselves; to share that to which one’s field experience has given one access” (p.82). Ottenberg (1990) sought to “understand another people and to write about them” (p.151). These and other definitions of traditional ethnography focus upon the descriptive and immersive qualities of the research approach. I find these definitions of ethnographic work limiting, particularly in their lack of a reform agenda, and thus I prefer to position my work within the approaches to research espoused by those known as critical ethnographers.

Critical ethnographers have been engaged in a process of negotiation towards different emphases and goals for ethnographic work than those chosen by their predecessors in the field. Apple
(1986) frames the critical ethnographer's work within a set of questions:

The politics of the researcher, how one's 'subjects' are constructed in the act of research, who the research is actually for, the role of the institution one is studying in the larger society, what that larger society looks like - these are often the driving questions that lie behind nearly all critically aware ethnographies. (p.7)

Anderson (1989) applies such understandings to the use of critical ethnography in educational contexts, and argues that the critical ethnographer's concern is with "unmasking dominant social constructions and the interests they represent, studying society with the goal of transforming it, and freeing individuals from sources of domination and repression" (p.354). Such researchers have largely rejected the claims to objectivity and value-neutrality which are the hallmarks of the empiricist approach. In acknowledging what is considered to be humanly implausible, that is, research without a value position, critical ethnographers have attempted to come up with alternative frameworks of validity.

Common to most of these emerging frameworks is the acknowledgement or inclusion of some form of 'transformation' in the research design. As a direct descendent of critical theory it is no surprise that critical ethnography retains an interest in the advancement of theory which is emancipatory, empowering or transformative. Angus (1986) argues that the interpretivist tradition of ethnography is limited by its failure to acknowledge the role of power in analyses of the structural location of 'human actors' (p.62). He argues that the use of critical ethnography in the study of schools is a preferred alternative and advocates a critical ethnography which would "attempt to expose the contradictions, located in time and space, that allow for the possibility for organisational and ultimately of social transformation" (p.66).

Simon and Dippo (1986) explore the implications of critical ethnography and offer three
“fundamental conditions” for warranting such a label. The second of these conditions is that “the work must be situated, in part, within a public sphere that allows it to become the starting point for the critique and transformation of the conditions of oppressive and inequitable moral and social regulation” (p.197). Quantz (1992) defends the theoretical tradition of critical ethnography and argues that “by exploring the concrete particulars of cultures located in historical material relations with theoretical commitments to democratic transformation, critical ethnography has contributed much to our present discourse” (p.497). Carspecken and Apple (1992) contend that a critical field study is one which is “aimed not only at making an empirical-descriptive contribution but also a theoretical contribution - deepening our understanding of core social-theoretical concepts such as ‘action’, ‘structure’, ‘culture’, and ‘power’” (p.511).

Critical research therefore seeks to do more than merely ‘paint a picture’ or ‘represent’ social relations; it seeks also to challenge and change the status quo which maintains inequitable power relations based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, or sexuality. The goal of emancipation of those oppressed by such power relations, thus emerges as a central element of the critical research agenda. This goal is replete with problematics. McRobbie (1982) articulates a number of valuable questions about the ‘researcher/researched’ relationship, which are of particular significance to those seeking a critical approach to ethnographic inquiry. She asks:

...why should we assume that we can actually do anything for them? Is this not an immensely patronizing stance? How can we assume they need anything done for them in the first place? Or conversely that we have anything real to offer them? (p.52)

McRobbie highlights the inherent arrogance of such presumptions, a concern which is shared by those scholars engaged in a parallel critique of critical and feminist pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1992; Luke, 1992).
This study attempted to meet the transformative or emancipatory element of critical ethnography in several ways, attempting to avoid some of the traps flowing from uncritical assumptions. The definition of emancipatory goals was a fluid process rather than something which I specified at the beginning of research and adhered to rigidly through to the conclusion of the study. As Roman (1993) notes:

"Exactly what constitutes emancipatory ends and means - as well as the justificatory grounds for research - would have to be deliberated at the outset and re-negotiated continually in light of what is known about the specific configurations of power relations between the researcher and the research subjects." (p.308)

With a focus on teachers and the construction and contexts of individual occupational autonomy for teachers, I had the opportunity to make a contribution to the theoretical understanding of the power relations which exist in all schools, and thus fulfil the transformative function suggested by Carspeckenh and Apple (1992) and Quantz (1992). Such theoretical insights as I have generated may have some impact on policy in a number of areas, but most specifically, on policy about teaching as an occupation, teachers' effectiveness in schools and their broader contribution to the education process.

My study also provided an opportunity for some level of transformation for the teachers who volunteered to take part. By creating an opportunity for teachers to critically reflect on their professional identity, I tried to engage them in a process of personal and professional development. But such a goal was coloured by the ultimately interventionist role that I played as a researcher in the school (McRobbie, 1982; Stacey, 1988). As Lightfoot (1983) acknowledges, "whether people are energized, enhanced, disoriented, or made more critical because of the researcher's presence and inquiry, it is important to be cognizant of the interventionist quality of this work and assume responsibility for establishing the boundaries of interaction and exchange"
(p.372). It is not possible for me to predict how such personal and professional development may have an impact upon the individual or power relations embedded within the school, the education system or society.

The administrators of the school clearly hoped that my study would provide them with a type of report card on the school, which they could then act upon. The deputy principal, Adele Mathews, commented that there is going to be some important feedback for us, I think, because our way of seeing it may not be the way that it is (A1.1026). One of the co-principals, Richard Simpson, made the point several times that the best thing I could “offer” the school was an outsider’s interpretation of what they were about. He implied that this would give the administrators something to work from if changes needed to be made in the school. Ultimately, although I would like to think that I attained some level of the transformative goal of critical ethnography, I will be happy to have achieved as little as that aimed for by Whyte (1943/1970) in his naturalistic study of Cornerville:

They helped me, in part, because they thought my book might help Cornerville. That is perhaps too much to expect, but at least I hope that it will not bring harm to them or to any of the people of Cornerville. (p.ix)

My understanding of the evolving tradition of critical ethnography includes an acceptance that my interpretation and portrait of the school is what Clifford (1986) calls “inevitably partial” (p.7). Rather than seeking the objectivist, reified ‘truth’ of the world I experienced at this school, I sought “rigorous partiality” (Clifford, 1986, p. 25), whereby I acknowledged my position as the interpreter of all I ‘saw’, but attempted to frame my picture in the mind maps of those who worked in the school. In his novel *Even cowgirls get the blues* (1976), Tom Robbins excuses his failure to keep his tale in chronological order on the basis that literature can not mirror reality. He
believes that:

A book no more contains reality than a clock contains time. A book may measure so-called reality as a clock measures so-called time; a book may create an illusion of reality as a clock creates an illusion of time; a book may be real, just as a clock is real (both more real, perhaps, than those ideas to which they allude); but let’s not kid ourselves - all a clock contains is wheels and springs and all a book contains is sentences. (p. 124)

A study such as this has no more claim on portraying reality than do the books or clocks referred to by Robbins.

Ethnography has traditionally been based on an acceptance of the generation of ‘thick description’. The most oft cited reference to thick description is to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) and his claim for ethnography to create a rich portrayal of the research site (p. 6). In borrowing this term from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Geertz variously uses it to mean intelligible description (p. 14), densely textured description (p. 28) and description resulting from long-term observation of a micro-environment (p. 23). He argues that the anthropologist’s material is most significant where it is generated from “long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts” (p. 23).

A blind acceptance of Geertz’s notion of thick description risks an emphasis on description at the risk of critical analysis. In a reflection on the role of field notes, Clifford (1990) argues convincingly, that “by associating ethnographic construction with description, however thick or problematic, Geertz limits a possibly far-reaching critique. For description inevitably suggests a specular, representational relation to culture” (p. 68). I, therefore, sought to go beyond thick description, to produce an analysis which incorporates both micro and macro levels of analysis.
and critique. I did this by situating responses from teachers within a framework consisting of my own interpretations of the social relations in action in the school, and understandings taken from the research literature to inform such perspectives.

2. Who am I?

In his prison notebooks, Antonio Gramsci (1971) reflected on the process of critical analysis in philosophy and looked to Socratic philosophy for some insights. He concluded that the “starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory” (p.324). The declaration of the “traces” and the values which emerge from the researcher’s understanding of her or his position in society, are closely linked to the advocacy of reflexivity by critical ethnographers (Quantz, 1992, p.475; Simon & Dippo, 1986, p.200; Van Maanen, 1988; p.73; Wolf, 1992, p.3). Sanjek (1990) argues that “our theoretical and ethnographic productions are, at last, subordinate to the social, political, symbolic, and economic issues that move and motivate us” and that these “never permit escape” (p.255). Some attempt at acknowledging these issues and forces is appropriate. I agree, however, with Gaskell (1992) who argues that political self-consciousness need not mean personal confession, but:

...rather a serious conceptual analysis of the frameworks that are being used, and an argument for their usefulness. Politically situating the research in this way can help the research have an impact, while at the same time improving the conceptual logic and academic value of the study. (p.32)

I do see a role for positioning myself as an individual in the research and attempting to declare my own value perspectives (Quantz, 1992, p.471).

My interest in teachers’ work stems from over a decade’s experience as a teacher in a number of secondary schools and a university in Queensland. I taught briefly in a state secondary school
early in my teaching career, but the main part of my seven years of teaching experience in schools has been in two independent schools. Both of these schools were girls’ only, one being non-systemic Catholic and the other owned by the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association. I held a position as a head of a department in a secondary school for a number of years and this experience of middle management left me with sympathy and empathy for teachers in similar roles. I was particularly mindful of this as an influence on my field observations and analysis.

My understandings of teachers’ work are coloured by the experience of serving on the union council for teachers in independent schools (Queensland Association of Teachers in Independent Schools (QATIS) which is discussed in some detail in chapter 6.2), where I dealt with a wide range of educational and labour relations issues. Many of the industrial disputes which came before this union related to issues about the boundaries of teachers’ roles, responsibilities, and to questions of teachers’ autonomy as an occupational group. I struggled at times with my role as a teacher advocate and the sometimes contradictory belief that teachers did need to be accountable to employers, students, parents and the rest of the occupation, for their actions.

Before beginning doctoral studies, I spent two years working in a staff development unit in a large metropolitan university in Queensland. This experience included consultations with individual academic staff on aspects of their teaching, and the presentation or teaching of workshops and courses on a range of subjects related to tertiary learning and teaching. My interest in professional development has been maintained, particularly as it intersects with understandings of the roles and responsibilities of teachers, whether they be at a tertiary or school-level.
These experiences informed the theoretical frameworks on which I drew both explicitly and implicitly. My fieldwork and analysis were premised on the assumption that the Australian education system is characterized by unequal power relations and oppressive conditions for many teachers. Of particular interest to me were the power relations which reflect male domination of women and the gender constructs which result from the pervasiveness of this inequitable distribution and exercise of power. The goal of transforming such power relations and challenging the hegemonic discourse which pervades education, is therefore an express aim of my research.

Such a commitment to understanding power relations in educational contexts naturally led me to an interest in the control that teachers may and may not have over their working lives and environments. I entered the field with a belief based on experience and intuition, that there is a strong connection between high levels of teacher autonomy and effective schools and teaching. I was interested to see whether and how this connection played out in a school with a declared commitment to teacher autonomy.

My own biases, ambitions and ideals were tested and prodded as I spent time in the school and began the process of analysing the data. I ‘read’ Thornton, the teachers and all my interactions and observations through my own experiences as a teacher, a unionist, a subject co-ordinator and a student. I brought to this research both an insider’s and outsider’s understanding of teachers’ work. The colours and textures of ‘the Thornton’ I present in this study are therefore very clearly influenced by my own teaching and life experiences.
3. Focus Questions

In contrast to the relatively open-ended ethnographic studies conducted by many researchers (Acker, 1990a; Wolcott, 1973), this study was framed by a particular set of what Miles and Huberman (1994) call “orienting ideas” (p.17). These centred on the fairly obvious hypothesis that an individual school context is instrumental in positioning and influencing teachers' perceptions about their work, in particular, their understandings of the level of autonomy they enjoy in their working lives. My focus during the interviews and observations was therefore on those features of the Thornton school context which appeared to influence teachers' understandings of their control over their working life and environment.

I was interested in exploring how teachers understood and experienced individual autonomy. The literature on sociology of work and occupations identifies autonomy as an important construct of all occupations but it is a relatively under-researched concept in relation to teachers. Ozga (in Ball, 1993) calls for researchers to “bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perception and experiences” (p.10). This study integrates an exploration of the macro influences on the autonomy of teachers at Thornton with a micro perspective of teachers in action, gleaned from field work in the school.

My interest in autonomy was overt to the school community, since the letter of introduction I provided to all participants included a synopsis of my research focus. It stated that I was interested in “exploring the dynamics of teacher autonomy as may exist within a particular school context”. I entered each interview with a framework which included questions about autonomy.
Sometimes I introduced the topic with direct questions - Do you feel that you have autonomy as a teacher in this school? Autonomy from what or whom? What do you understand by the term autonomy? How important is it to you as a teacher to have autonomy? Some people did not require a prompt question, but led me indirectly into the area, for example, by mentioning professionalism or their perception of teaching as a profession. Such comments allowed me to raise questions about an individual's perceived levels of autonomy more incidentally during the course of the interview.

4. Selection and access issues

How did I make a decision about which school to approach as a possible research site? Sampling is not a notion which is restricted to the territorial ambit of quantitative research. There is the challenge of what Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe as “theoretical sampling” in qualitative research, whereby researchers sample to identify the properties of theoretical categories rather than to achieve a broad representative sample of a particular population. As a case study, the sampling in this study was refined to an issue of the selection of one field site. So, why did I choose Thornton College? Selection was ultimately serendipitous, opportunistic and subjective, but it was framed by an initial rationale and process of choice.

Single case studies such as this run the risk of being challenged on grounds of their lack of representativeness and, thus goes the argument, the inability of any accompanying analysis to be generalisable. This argument is framed by the criteria of quantitative research and an essential ignorance of the possible ‘truth’ claims made by ethnographic studies. Griffin (1991) dismisses this criticism on the grounds that “field research is less obsessed with representativeness, and
more concerned with examining the processes through which social and cultural dynamics operate” (p.117). Miles and Huberman (1994) make the point that within a single case study lie many other strata. They argue that “much qualitative research examines a single ‘case,’ some phenomenon embedded in a single social setting. But settings have subsettings (schools have classrooms, classrooms have cliques, cliques have individuals), so deciding where to look is not easy” (p.27).

I began with a desire to study an independent school, and further reduced that to independent schools which were not connected to one of the non-secular education systems operating in the state (e.g. the Brisbane Catholic Education Office). My interest in basing my field work in an independent school stemmed from a number of factors. Firstly, I am interested in a general sense in independent schooling, the operation and organisation of such schools and their educational offerings. An increasing number of parents in Australia are opting to pay for an education for their children by sending them to schools in the expanding independent sector (see Appendix A). I would argue that the burgeoning interest in such schools demands a level of public critical insight into them as educational institutions, which may to some extent run at odds with their designation and character as ‘private’ institutions. My own background in education as both as a student and teacher in independent schools in Brisbane, fostered this academic interest. I was also interested to see how individual teacher autonomy was understood by teachers in an independent school and what factors influenced their experience of autonomy. Some of these factors may emerge as having resonance with schools of both sectors, but some would undoubtedly be particular to the school and the non-government schooling sector.
In making a decision to study an independent school I was also rather naively attempting to avoid what I anticipated would be a lengthy access negotiation with the State Department of Education to conduct a study in one of their schools. For the same reason I narrowed the options within independent schools to those which were not Catholic systemic schools, under the auspices of the Brisbane Catholic Education Office. I thought that access may have been easier where I only had to negotiate with the principal and Board and not a central bureaucracy as well. In retrospect, this reasoning may have been misguided.

A further criterion was also a personal and pragmatic one (accepting Van Maanen’s (1991) call for the field worker to “recognize as legitimate the personal matters that lead one into a project” (p.33)). I felt that proximity to my home was worth considering when I anticipated spending an intense period of fieldwork at the school. So the first school I contacted was close to where I lived. I realized after two rebuffs that proximity was a luxury I could not afford, and my third choice of school was on the other side of the city from where I was living.

In choosing the first two schools I approached, I was mindful that I had some personal knowledge of the school or professional connections with them. The first school was chosen because it was well known to me as an independent school, and quite similar to the school at which I had most recently taught for six years. I thought my case might be helped by the fact that I was known by a number of staff in the school and that although I did not personally know the principal, I knew of her by reputation, as I am sure she did me. The second school was chosen because it was again an independent school, and I had worked there many years before in a non-teaching capacity; the principal knew of me, and the deputy principal knew me quite well.
Failure to negotiate access to either of those schools made me discard personal or professional knowledge, and I approached Thornton College. It was independent and geographically removed from me. I did not know anyone at the school, and I had no idea if I was known to staff at the school. The school had a reputation for innovative approaches to education and apart from my interest in what I understood staff were doing, I thought that commitment to 'progressive' practice might make the school open to a researcher.

I believe that my research was particularly enriched by the 'lucky' selection of Thornton as a field site. I would ultimately, however, endorse Wolcott's (1973) conclusion when he ascribes his 'selection' of Edward Bell, the elementary school principal he shadowed over a two year period, down to "good fortune" rather than any systematic process (p.1).

Two stages of the research process stand out as particularly fraught with frustration and angst. The first was gaining access to a school and the second was the transcribing process which will be discussed later in this chapter. It took me five months to negotiate access once I returned to Australia from Canada, and somewhat longer if I date negotiations from the first letter of contact (June, 1994) I sent to a school. Reading of similar experiences of other researchers provided only fleeting comfort. Linda Valli (1986, p.216) took five months to negotiate access to a school and teacher for her fieldwork in the United States. Paul Atkinson's (1981) study of a Scottish medical school took over a year to negotiate.

I returned from Canada to Brisbane in late August 1994. Shortly before my departure from Vancouver I received a letter from the principal of the first school I approached, saying that she
would be very interested in talking to me about my research project on my return to Brisbane. I rather foolishly and optimistically interpreted this to mean that I was ‘on my way’ in terms of negotiating access to this particular school. On my return I made several phone calls to the principal’s secretary and I was eventually informed that the principal had “consulted the staff and that they had said they were too busy” and thus I would not be able to do my field work at that school. I was philosophical about this setback at the time, although obviously disappointed. My frustration came some weeks later whilst attending a dinner party, when one of the other guests disclosed that the staff had never been consulted, neither had heads of departments and the change in the principal’s response to my request appeared attributable to undisclosed reasons. I approached a second school, which after some weeks also denied access on the grounds that they were all “too busy” and that a school review was planned for 1995 and would be taking up a lot of additional staff time.

I sent a letter of contact to the third school in early November and then followed up with a phone call two weeks later. I spoke with the person on the reception desk at Thornton. She said that Richard Simpson, one of the co-principals would get back to me but that it was a very busy time for the school. Having heard nothing, I rang back a week later and sent a second copy of the original letter outlining my research intentions. The summer school holidays intervened, which in Australia come over a six week period at Christmas time, and from early December to late January the school was essentially closed, with no opportunity to follow up my initial attempts at contact.

I recontacted the school in late January and within days Richard Simpson rang back, most
apologetic about the length of time he had taken to get back to me. He said he was very interested in having me at the school, particularly because they had made a special effort to encourage teacher professionalism in the way they had not structured the school. He said they would appreciate feedback about how successful they had been in strengthening teachers' sense of professionalism.

He spoke with great enthusiasm about a trip he had made to the United States and Canada in 1993 to visit a number of schools. We briefly discussed schooling in North America, and my experiences in Canada. He arranged to ring me back within the week to confirm a time for me to meet with the rest of the administration team, namely Paul Browning, the other co-principal, and Adele Mathews, the deputy principal. In the call confirming that meeting he said that the administration team had sent out a memo to all staff outlining my research, asking anyone for problems with it to reply to the administration team within a few days. He felt that such a process was a formality but that it was necessary to consult with the whole staff before committing the school to the research. Later in an interview, Adele Mathews revealed the importance of this step:

*We at one stage agreed to some people coming in to do research. Because we thought it was really good we got them to come to the teachers' meeting to speak. Now in hindsight, they're a bit of a captive audience, and maybe that isn't fair. So for your request, we put a note on the noticeboard and explained what you would be doing and if anyone's got any problems, will you come into the teachers' meeting to talk about it please...I think you learn.* A1.965

Richard Simpson rang again to report on the staff reaction to the research proposal. He said that everything was fine but that some staff were concerned about the time implications of my study
for them. He said that he was aware of Bob Connell's research and it seemed that my approach was going to be similar to that. He also discussed his experience at the Harvard Graduate School of Education where he had done a short course for principals during his sabbatical in 1993. He occasionally received a newsletter from them which had recently included an interview with Sara Lawrence Lightfoot. We discussed the similarities between my research and that conducted by Lightfoot in *The Good High School* (1983). I was immediately struck by his familiarity with such educational research and his readiness to integrate it so naturally into his conversation. I got the feeling that this was not merely for my benefit but something which he did as a matter of course.

My first visit to the school was on the 16th of February when I met with the co-principals, Richard Simpson and Paul Browning, the deputy principal being sick that day. They turned the agenda of the meeting over to me, so I briefly explained what I wanted to do and they seemed generally agreeable to the tenor of my approach. They raised a number of issues during the course of this meeting which are important to acknowledge because they were an initial frame for my entry to the school.

Mindful of avoiding any direction or manipulation of my research, they asked if they could highlight a number of aspects of the school which they felt could be overlooked. The pivotal nature of outdoor education to the curriculum of the school was one of these. This did not surprise me, as during my wait in the foyer I had noticed a number of prominently placed photographs of students engaged in abseiling, kayaking, rockclimbing and other outdoor activities. They were eager for me to understand the totality of what they called *the Thornton experience*. 
They discussed the unique administration structure adopted at Thornton. Simple structural processes had been implemented to aid in the sharing of leadership in the school, including the rotation of administration meetings through their three adjoining offices, and a rotational chairing of staff meetings by the administration team. They also mentioned that they did not have special car parks allocated to them, and as a result they sometimes missed out on a space in the car park in the school grounds!

Some time was devoted to the best way of introducing the research to the staff. Richard was concerned that a staff meeting might not be the most appropriate time because of problems experienced by other speakers at staff meetings. In addition, it became clear that someone had attempted to conduct doctoral research at the school some years ago, and that his/her approach antagonised the staff to such a degree that there was some resistance to allowing someone else in to “study their school”. I was, however, keen to speak to the staff as a whole, so that I was introduced to everyone at once, and that consequently people would not speculate about the unknown woman wandering about the school. It was decided that I would write to all members of staff outlining my research and that I would speak briefly at a staff meeting.

Staff meetings at Thornton are significantly called ‘teacher meetings’. This nomenclature underlines the oft made presumption that teachers are the only ‘staff’ in a school. In this way, Thornton acknowledges that there are other workers in the school other than teachers, who are also credited with the title - staff. I spoke at the teachers’ meeting on the 20 February 1995. Richard introduced me and I gave a ten minute overview of my research, and spelt out the particular commitment I was asking for from teachers. I handed out the letter I had prepared (see
Appendix B) and then invited questions. There were none, and I observed for the remainder of the teachers’ meeting. Thus, the following day, some five months after my return from Canada, I commenced my fieldwork in the school.

The official sanction of access to a field site is clearly not the end of the negotiation process. Gaining access is something which is ongoing throughout a study (Burgess, 1991, p.43; Delamont, 1992, p.102; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991, p.25). I ‘re-requested’ access to a number of events which I felt were a little out of the range of the normal school routine and where my presence might cause some difficulty for the participants. For example, I approached the union representatives for permission to observe an enterprise bargaining meeting of staff one lunch hour in the final weeks of my fieldwork; and I approached the principals for permission to attend a professional development day at the beginning of Term Two which focused on industrial issues connected with the enterprise bargaining agreement. The only request I made which was denied was to attend a Council meeting. Richard Simpson thought that there may be delicate topics discussed at such a meeting and that it would be better if I did not attend.

The negotiation of access to a field site was a valuable although frustrating learning experience. A significant learning outcome was that research involving fieldwork is not only labour intensive but also time intensive, and that the best, most strategic planning can not overcome the simple need for time. My experience of the process also provoked a number of other insights into this stage of the research.

The individual in a school with the power to make a decision about research is the principal. Yet I
discovered that it is very difficult to get direct access to the principal of a school if you are an outsider, particularly someone seeking permission to conduct research. The notion of 'gatekeepers' is a common thread to discussions of access in qualitative research projects (Broadhead & Rist, 1976; Burgess, 1991; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Wax, 1980), and in the school context, my experience was that it can be very difficult to get beyond the receptionist or principal's secretary.

I only managed to get through to the secretary of the first school I contacted, and the deputy principal of the second school (because she had taught me at school and knew me quite well). I never spoke directly with either principal, despite requesting an interview in writing and on the telephone. At Thornton, my initial contact was with the school receptionist, but after several calls I got through to one of the co-principals. The notion of secretary as gate-keeper is clearly well and truly entrenched in schools.

I selected the first two schools I approached, in part because I felt that I had a personal connection of some sort with them. Admittedly, the experience of approaching two schools for access is very limited, but I am not so sure that being 'known' is necessarily an advantage to gaining access. The issue of how or for what one is known is also significant in gaining access. In the first two schools I contacted I was known slightly by the principals and known well by numerous other members of staff. (See Hammersley & Atkinson (1983, p.53) for their discussion of the benefits of being known.) I was well known in the teaching community of both of the schools, but this did not assist me in getting access. It is conceivable that being known worked against me. In the school I eventually got access to, I had no close connections, although I knew
of several people who taught there through other colleagues or friends.

One of the greatest challenges for a researcher is balancing the need to be assertive and 'pushy' with the need to respect others' rights to deny access. If a school chooses to say no to a researcher, surely it is entitled to do so. In my third letter, I changed the format slightly to include a concluding sentence which said that I would ring by a certain date to discuss the letter with the principal. I made this change to overcome the delay I encountered with the second school, when some four weeks passed between sending the letter and my follow-up phone call, at a point when no-one had contacted me. The lesson was clear, people in schools are very busy and if you seek a prompt decision, it is necessary to take the initiative yourself and make a follow-up call shortly after they should have received the initial letter of contact.

Burgess (1991) points to the "politics of social investigation" as an important dimension to access considerations in qualitative research. It is clear that the nature of the focus of research looms as a significant factor in such politics, particularly in terms of gaining access. A particularly controversial topic may well intimidate gatekeepers at potential research sites. A colleague (who is not a teacher) read my letter of contact after I had secured access to a school and she felt that the topic of my thesis would have scared her off from allowing me entry. She said that the notion of teacher autonomy "screamed at her" as having the potential to stir all sorts of conflict up in a school. That may be so, but the ethical dilemma of being open and honest with people countered any temptation I had to temper the topic so as to make it 'more acceptable'.

Particular research questions may reward the researcher with quicker entry than others, depending
on the politics of the question and approach adopted. For example, the Exemplary Schools Project (1995) in Canada, which was premised on a positive perspective for prospective schools in terms of their ‘exemplary nature’, posed relatively few problems in terms of access. As noted by Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) in their discussion of the problems of gaining access in qualitative research, “the chances of getting permission to undertake the research are increased when the researcher’s interests appear to coincide with those of the subjects. Gatekeepers of formal organizations may believe that the research will report favourably on an issue they wish publicized” (p.26).

My research interest was independent schools which have apparently limited public accountability (although this point is debatable and is further discussed throughout the study), nor do they need to account to a central office’s demands to be part of a research project. Their very independence meant that I could approach each school directly through the principal rather than through a central Education Department Research Department (the process for seeking permission to do research in a state school), but it also meant that the principal was in the position to say yes or no, independent of any external pressure. Independent schools are private organisations, and as such, reflect similar problems of entry that researchers ‘studying up’ have encountered, where they have sought access to institutions that would prefer to remain private.

5. Field work

If cultural anthropology is any guide, an ethnographic account of a particular site can potentially take many years. In contrast, some researchers utilising ethnographic methods spend only a brief time in the field. Delamont (1992) concludes that the ‘usual’ ethnographic research period ranges
from at least six weeks to a year (p.150). The intensity of time spent in the field over the total period of fieldwork must also be factored in. For example, a day a week over two years may not represent the same sort of experience as intense and continuous observation over one or two months.

There is clearly no rule about the appropriate length of time to spend in the field. Walker (1988) spent five years working on his ethnography of a public high school in Sydney. Peshkin (1986) devoted four semesters to fieldwork in a fundamentalist Christian school. In his ethnography as an ‘insider’ from a position as a member of the teaching staff, Bullivant (1978) spent fifteen months studying Lubavitcher School, one the few fulltime Jewish schools in the state of Victoria, Australia. Everhart (1977) devoted two years to a study of student life in a junior high school in the United States.

In contrast to these quite lengthy periods in the field, are the brief intervals spent in the field by researchers in the Carnegie Foundation’s study of American high schools in the 1980s. Observers in that project spent a minimum of twenty days at each school site, although some spent more time. Perrone et al (1985) noted that:

> Although twenty days were not enough for a rigorous ethnographic study, they allowed, as it turned out, sufficient time for experienced observers to gain a significant understanding of the schools, their principal motifs, and the issues that confronted them. The observers were able to capture in important ways the life of the schools; they came away in every case, with powerful impressions, vivid vignettes, and poignant personal statements. (p.2)

Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot includes her contribution to the Carnegie project, a case study of Brookline High School, in her study of six secondary schools, *The Good High School* (1983). Although her interviews and observations were conducted over three years, they were based on
very short periods at each of the six schools. She makes no claims for her “portraits” as ethnographies, but she used ethnographic strategies in painting her pictures of the schools.

My time spent in the field fell between these two positions. Deciding on the span of a school term was in part an acknowledgement that schools may not welcome a researcher for an extended period, whereas a term seemed to be an arbitrary but controlled time frame. In addition, I paid heed to the cautionary advice proffered by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983):

It may be possible to undertake the occasional period of extended fieldwork, but these are hard to sustain...In any event, long uninterrupted periods of fieldwork are not always to be encouraged. The production of decent field notes, the indexing and filing of material, writing memoranda and reflexive notes are all time-consuming and demanding activities. Very long periods of observation will thus become quite unmanageable. (p.48)

I attempted to gain entry to the school for the start of the 1995 school year (the Australian academic year beginning in late January and ending in early to mid December for the summer vacation). Due to the lengthy access negotiations, I did not begin until two weeks into Term One. I spent the remainder of Term One and about a month into Term Two in the field. For much of that term I spent four days a week in the school, and attempted to leave one day for working on field notes at the computer. In order to accommodate staff needs for convenient times for interviews, I frequently spent five days a week in the school.

I was disappointed that I had not managed to see the school in the opening weeks of the new school year, well aware that as Delamont (1992) suggests, “the opening days of a new academic year are especially productive for researchers” (p.86). Capturing some sense of the school at that time of the year would also have fulfilled the cyclical or holistic perspective sought by ethnographers. As Wolcott (1973) notes, “anthropologists embarking upon an ethnographic
inquiry usually attend to the range of activities that comprise a complete cycle of activities among their subjects” (p.178). Delamont’s concern related to the importance of the beginning of the school year for studying student groups, but it is just as significant for studying the work cycles of teachers. The orientation for new staff, the first staff meeting for the year and other rituals of the teacher’s life can be seen as vital for her or his socialization within a particular school culture.

The question of when to leave the site was partly determined by completion of the schedule of interviews and observations that I had developed during the fieldwork. Whyte (1943/1970) highlights the need to draw the line somewhere, because the reality is that “in a sense, the study of a community or an organization has no logical end point. The more you learn, the more you see that there is to learn” (p.325). The notion of leaving the field at the point of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), or when you have achieved what Fine (1983, p.252) describes as the point of “diminishing analytical returns” remain arbitrary signposts, despite attempts by some to quantify them. I adopted Delamont’s (1992) more intuitive approach which was to “stay long enough to appreciate the depth of the material” (p.141).

No doubt further developments took place in relation to all of the significant threads I was attempting to observe during one term’s fieldwork, but I drew the line in mid May. I had originally planned to stay for one term in the school, based on intensive fieldwork over that time. By the end of Term One 1995, a very long school term, I had almost completed the 63 interviews I had scheduled, but I felt the need to include some more formal observation of teachers in their daily routine. I returned to the school in Term Two, and spent a further three weeks doing the final interviews and most of the formal observations. I felt that the interviews and the informal
observations I had made in the previous term were sufficient, but that the formal shadowing periods would give additional support for some claims. This also gave me an opportunity for observation of the commencement of a new term, if not a new year.

Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, observations of the everyday routine of the school's life, shadowing of teachers, and examination of documents such as school magazines and archival materials (the latter being very scarce at Thornton). Traditional ethnographic work has often progressed on a developmental and incremental model with data collection strategies evolving over time. This is acknowledged by Ball (1984) in describing his fieldwork at Beachside Comprehensive:

None of my reading on research methods seemed to turn up a model of fieldwork practice which I could translate straightforwardly into a structured routine of data collection at my school. I was left very much to my own devices to arrive at a set of working methods which, as I refined them over time, began systematically to build up various sets and categories of data. (p.71)

I entered the field with a clear research strategy in mind. I was prepared to make changes and accommodations to the plan, but it gave me considerable comfort during the initial stages of fieldwork to have some sense of what to do next. My knowledge of schools and previous experience doing similar research undoubtedly assisted in framing a strategy which I felt was appropriate for the particular context.

I decided that I would attempt to interview all members of the Thornton staff - teachers and support staff - who were prepared to accede to my request. I felt that a random or selective sampling of staff for interviews in a case study of this kind could too easily leave out an important piece of evidence. I did not, however, extend my interview schedule to include students or
parents. I felt justified in this decision on the basis that my focus was on teachers' perceptions of an aspect of their working lives, and that although interviews with students and parents would yield insights into the operation of the school, they would be unlikely to add to an understanding of the research question. I felt, however, that the support staff in the school could provide insights into teachers' work in the school from a different perspective, and I therefore included them in the interview schedule. I ultimately interviewed all 57 of the teaching, administrative, and support staff. I conducted 63 interviews, speaking with some people more than once.

No member of staff refused to be interviewed. One member of staff I approached early in my time at the school, had recently experienced a family problem and he asked to be excused at that time, but when I asked him again some weeks later, he was very happy to be interviewed. I was pleasantly surprised that my experience did not support Delamont’s (1992) prediction that “most researchers find one or more staff who refuse access or are deeply uncomfortable at an outsider’s presence” (p.88).

Informed written consent was obtained from each person who agreed to be interviewed or shadowed. The meaning of ‘informed consent’ is somewhat problematic, but I proceeded on an understanding of the term as consent which is “knowledgeable, exercised in a situation of voluntary choice, made by individuals who are competent or able to choose freely” (Thorne, 1980, p.285). I concur with Wax (1980) in his analysis of the paradoxes inherent in obtaining consent in fieldwork, that “consent is not contractual, but developmental; it is a process, not a single event” (p.282). I therefore did not frame consent within the one-time assent given by the co-principals to my research, but continued to renegotiate the conditions for consent with each
There were several opportunities for renegotiation of consent with individuals during the research process. I gave people time to read the consent form before the interview began, and although they had signed the consent form which included details of the taping process, I always reiterated the question as to whether they minded having the interview taped. As mentioned earlier, I also renegotiated access to several events which I considered to be potentially controversial, out of a concern that my presence as observer may have an effect on the proceedings.

In the consent form, and at the beginning of each interview, I made assurances to staff that their responses would be cited anonymously and that I would attempt to maintain that anonymity in the way I used their responses. I was however, well aware of the difficulty of assuring such anonymity in such a small community, and I made that clear to people in discussions about anonymity. I invited teachers and support staff to choose their own pseudonym, selecting a name they would easily remember, so that they could track any comments taken from their interview. Some people chose a name which is more commonly used by the opposite gender. Despite the problems I envisaged with this in the analysis, I allowed these selections because it meant that people felt less identifiable in particular contexts where a name associated with a particular gender would clearly identify the speaker. Thus when comments are identified by name in the text, the gender of the speaker cannot be presumed by the name used. When analysing responses I took care to look for gender patterns before I used the comments as supporting evidence, and this is acknowledged in the analysis. In some sections which may be perceived as controversial for the school, I have left out the pseudonym and identification number because there is a possibility that
the identity of speakers could be deduced from the context. I chose the pseudonyms for the administrators because the decision to withdraw the school’s name was made at a very late stage. After an initial reading of a draft the administrators agreed to my using the school’s name, but after threats by one member of staff to take legal action over one section of the draft, the administrators decided to withdraw permission and the pseudonym of Thornton was adopted.

I avoided using techniques such as composite voices (Connell et al, 1982; Sizer, 1985) because I feel that it is important to reflect the integrity of the voice of each individual. I agree with Wolcott (1973) that:

To present the material in such a way that even the people central to the study are ‘fooled’ by it is to risk removing those very aspects that make it vital, unique, believable, and at times painfully personal. I have instead tried to keep the real actors in mind in every sentence I have written, attempting constantly to anticipate whether those actually involved in the interaction recorded here would accept the account as I have rendered it. (p.4)

I found that as I was writing up the project I had no difficulty in ‘bringing up’ a picture in my mind of the individual I was citing, her/his role in the school and even the look on her/his face during the interview. The real actors were therefore always in my mind as I wrote and reflected on the data.

Most of the interviews lasted a teaching period, approximately forty-five minutes. They were generally conducted at a table in an enclosed courtyard area adjoining the staff common room. A number of people referred to this table as ‘Carol’s office’, and it became a space in which I felt quite comfortable and at which I could readily be found. It was sufficiently private to give people a feeling that no-one else could hear what they were saying, but it was also sufficiently public to give me a profile in the school for the time I was there.
All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The consent form I used indicated that interviews would be taped, but in addition I verbally asked people at the beginning of the interview whether they would object to the taping. Only one person hesitated, and at the conclusion of the interview she asked whether she could take the tape home that night to check what she had said. I agreed and she returned the tape the next day, seemingly happy with the outcome.

Some ethnographers and biographers have indicated a degree of reluctance about the use of tape recorders for interviews because of the impact their presence has on the interviewee and the effort that is involved in transcribing them (Malcolm, 1994, p.183; Wolcott, 1973, p.9). Wolcott (1973) observed that “only the remarkable frankness which the staff exhibited during interview sessions [made him feel] that the time and effort invested in the tapes were warranted”(p.10). As I lumbered through the process of transcribing 63 tapes of at least 40 minutes each, there were moments when I shared Wolcott’s hesitance. But in the end, I knew that had I been consumed with the activity of writing notes throughout the interviews, I would not have made the connections that I feel I did make with staff, and I would not have engaged with them as successfully.

In interviewing Edward Bell, the “man in the Principal’s office”, Wolcott became aware of things other than the subject on the tape, including a persistent squeak in the Principal’s chair (p.9). My interviews were often held in an outside venue, and during the transcribing process I became aware of the vibrant and plentiful birdlife at Thornton, as very noisy crows at times overwhelmed human voices. A neighbouring school used an electronic bell which rang through very clearly on
the tapes, and reinforced the positive impact of the absence of bells at Thornton.

I began the interviewing process with an interview schedule comprised of a number of questions or areas which I wished to explore. I rarely referred to this schedule, preferring to allow the issues I was interested in to flow out of individual responses. In asking questions I made a point of beginning with familiar territory for people - I asked about their history in the school, what they had done before coming to Thornton - things which they could answer easily. I then led into questions which were, in a sense, more difficult. These questions asked people to evaluate particular structures and features of the school. I attempted to end by inviting people to suggest changes or improvements to the school, which was a way of providing a sense of closure to the interview.

Despite their daily routine of speaking to a ‘public’ audience, many teachers initially found the interview context confronting and uncomfortable. This was a sharp reminder to me of the very artifice of the interview, even in a culture where the media interview is a daily part of our viewing and listening experience. An interview remains an event which is orchestrated and not a ‘naturally’ arising situation for either the interviewer or the interviewee. It is clearly not only people from cultures other than one’s own who find the interview threatening or alienating (Briggs, 1986).

The inherent ‘politics’ of the interview have been acknowledged by many researchers (Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Patai, 1988; Oakley, 1981; Sanjek, 1990). Briggs (1986) argues persuasively in his exploration of the interview as a “communicative event” that the interview itself must be the
subject of critical reflection. He claims that the interview is a “collectively created portrait of ‘the real world’ which is produced with our goals as a researcher firmly framing it” (p.120). By imposing our own expectations of the communicative event, the interview, on our interviewees, we are committing “communicative hegemony” (p.121).

Janet Malcolm (1994) observes in her reflections on the process of researching and writing biography, that:

In most interviews, both subject and interviewer give more than is necessary. They are always being seduced and distracted by the encounter’s outward resemblance to an ordinary friendly meeting. The meal that is often thrown around it like a cloth, to soften the edges; the habits of chat and banter; the conversational reflexes, whereby questions are obediently answered and silences too quickly filled - all these inexorably pull the interlocutors away from their respective desires and goals. (p.173)

In her study of the lives of lesbian teachers, Khayatt (1990) acknowledged the limitations of the interviews she conducted with eighteen women. She notes that despite the detail of the interviews, they are incomplete pictures of the women’s lives because the women were:

...bound by my questions, by the context of how I organized my framework, and by the narrowness of my interest in their lives. Since I caught them, for the most part, on one specific day in one particular mood, what has been captured is this moment, bracketed and analysed, a moment in their lives as well as in my own. (p.241)

In response to the temporality of the “bracketed moment” of the interview, at the end of each interview I invited teachers to write down further ideas after the interview and to pass their reflections on to me. This was also an attempt to give teachers the opportunity Lather (1991) writes of in her espousal of emancipatory approaches to research - “to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched at least as much as ... to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge” (p.60). No-one offered me a follow-up written reflection.
The use of transcribed interviews as data has been recognised by a number of scholars as problematic. Tripp (1983) recognises the inherent problems of the transcribed interview as data in his comment that “transcription must be recognized for what it is: a method of analysis which, like all such procedures, exposes, discloses, obscures, and deletes certain information” (p.35).

There are also the limitations which Laslett and Rapoport (1975) note:

> Even when an interview is recorded, an incomplete record of the interaction between the interviewer and respondent is obtained. Much that occurs at the beginning and end of the interview is lost, and many interviewers find that these moments may provide crucial information. (p.972)

The non-verbal communication that flavours conversation is also lost in the transcript of the interview. The transcribed interview is, as suggested by Dorothy Smith (1987), an “edited version” of the actual interaction between two people, because “the editorial function of the tape recorder has reduced the totality of the interview process to the verbal sequence defining the interview as such” (p.187). I think these observations are valid, particularly where transcribed interviews are analysed by researchers who have not conducted the original interviews. But as mentioned earlier, I had a surprisingly clear recollection of each interview I conducted, which was aided by accompanying field notes made after each interview. I was thus able to recreate more of the “totality” of the process than would have been produced by a transcript alone.

As I suggested earlier, the transcribing process was quite simply a nightmare. The cost of having professional transcribers work on the tapes was prohibitive. It took me several months to transcribe all 63 interviews despite being a quite proficient typist. I found, however, that although it was an incredibly time consuming activity there was real value in doing it myself. Listening to the interviews as I typed them meant that I was revisiting and immersing myself in the ‘spoken’ voice of the people I talked with, not merely their ‘written’ voice on a page. I refined the coding
scheme (which slowly evolved during the fieldwork) as I worked through the transcribing process. I suspect that as a result, the coding was much more comprehensive than it would have been had I produced it from merely reading over the transcripts. Even so, I had to continually remind myself that transcribing was an essential stage in the research process, rather than an inconvenient and seemingly endless chore eating into precious time. As noted by Richards and Richards (1987), there is a quite stark contrast between “the low status of messy clerical tasks” and “the glamour of field research” in the minds of many qualitative researchers (p.24), and transcribing is too easily dismissed as such a menial task.

The ethnographic approach I adopted included both formal and informal observations. The importance of complementing interviews with observation has been recognised by a number of researchers. Sanjek (1990) argues that too often with interview-based research, “the ‘field’ is approached indirectly or even shut out (Powdermaker 1966:22). Ethnographers need to see as much of their informants’ turf as they can” (p.188). In an illuminating account of her ethnographic methodology, Lareau (1989) observes that it was very important for her to “supplement the interviews with classroom observation which improved the interviews and enabled [her] to ‘triangulate’ in a way that would have been impossible with interviews alone” (p.217). Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) argue that one of the drawbacks of their replication of Lortie’s work was the absence of observations. They did not corroborate their data from teacher self-perceptions with observations of classroom or other behaviour (p.294). I was conscious of the limitations of observations in generating insights into teachers’ perceptions of their working world. Jackson (1968/1990) reminds the researcher that the behaviour of the teacher in their classroom does not always reveal what we want to know:
Occupational attitudes, the feelings of satisfaction and of disappointment accompanying success and failure, the reasoning that lies behind action - these and many other aspects of a craft are scarcely visible except through conversations with a person who has experienced them. (p.115)

Formal observations included the 'shadowing' of six teachers for a day each, following them through their daily routine. I also observed a number of events or meetings that contributed to the life of the school during the term, including the Leadership Ceremony, the Easter Service, a parent information evening, a bomb hoax, teacher meetings, subject co-ordinator meetings, collegial group meetings, a professional development day and a union meeting. I generally sat at the rear of a room for such observations and took notes during the proceedings. I found the Staff Noticeboard an interesting focus for continuing observation, and took regular note of postings on it over the weeks that I was in the school.

More informal observations took place during casual conversations, meetings in the school grounds, or lunch. These opportunities for observation were seldom planned, but proved to be invaluable. As Delamont (1992) notes, “informal interviewing in the field setting is the main way that hypotheses can be tested” (p.110). I did not take notes at lunch or morning tea, but I often jotted down observations afterwards, although only impressions or the general direction of conversations, nothing verbatim. At one formal meeting I felt compelled not to take notes because I misread the room dynamics and ended up sitting beside the person chairing the meeting. The meeting was to discuss employer enterprise bargaining proposals and I felt that my note taking may be misinterpreted and potentially inhibit the discussion.

Each evening I transcribed my field notes to the computer and filled out further details which I
had not been able to record at the time. I made analytical memos in spaces between the observation notes and transcribed them into separate computer files which were cross-referenced to the field note files. A close friend in Canada had given me a blank book as a parting gift, in which she inscribed the wish for a successful ethnographic journey. During my fieldwork I wrote about impressions and concerns in this book.

I foraged for and collected any written documents I could locate during my time in the school. These included the school prospectus, policies, teachers' handbook, school magazines, action plans from teachers' meetings and school newsletters. The search for archival material proved rather fruitless, partly because the school has not yet arrived at a point where it perceives itself as an historical entity. This was despite a call in a review of the school done in 1992, for maintenance of records and archives so that “the history of the school is reported for future reference” (Thornton Evaluation Report, 1992, p.100). There were several collections of photographs in the school library, but little other material to which I was given access.

My first day of fieldwork at Thornton was February 20, 1995. Stacey (1988) argues that “ethnographic writing is not cultural reportage, but cultural construction, and always a construction of self as well as of the other” (p.115). I was very conscious of the importance of positioning myself in the school in a particular way, but the nuances of that position are quite difficult to articulate.

At a superficial level there was the question of what I wore. Delamont (1992) argues that “it is important to record what is worn, and why, and to think carefully about what is being conveyed
to potential respondents by clothing and other bodily signs” (p.85). I would neither choose nor was I capable of adopting, the “researcher as kewpie doll” persona, as described by Griffin (1991) in her ethnographic study of the transition of young working class women from education to work in England. She had consciously worked towards constructing a “suitably respectable feminine appearance” (p.113), but was in hindsight critical of the outcomes of this positioning.

On my first visit to the school I took careful note of the ‘dress code’ adopted by teachers. I was keen to attempt to dress in a similar way to teachers in the school, so as to make myself as visually unobtrusive as possible in the field. In contrast to my observations at other independent schools, including those where I had taught, the dress standards I noted on my first visit to Thornton were very casual and informal (as will be discussed in chapter 4.2(ii)).

At my first meeting with the co-principals, they were wearing good casual clothes, certainly not the suit and tie attire that is the common dress of many male principals in similar schools. At the teachers’ meeting which was my first formal meeting with the staff, there were women and men in shorts, a couple in jeans, a number in the then fashionable outdoor boot, and some in runners. I therefore adopted a casual form of dress, although I only wore jeans on one day when I was interviewing one of the co-principals and was spending no extended time in the school grounds.

My field notes from the second day of fieldwork read “Today is my first ‘real’ day...I was nervous, uneasy, apprehensive...I have to be assertive and just approach teachers. I think they are just waiting to be asked” (Field notes, 21.2.95). By the Wednesday of my first week in the school, I was clearly more comfortable in the school as my field notes indicated - “I did feel more
comfortable in the school. I made myself sit with people at lunch and morning tea. After morning tea, I managed to line up most of my interviews for next week...Everybody has been very friendly...I’m enjoying the process of discovery” (Field notes, 22.2.95).

The desire to establish rapport with people in the field is a recognised fundamental of ethnographic approaches. It is difficult to measure or quantify the level of rapport that I may or may not have achieved with the staff at Thornton. I can make the claim that I established a good rapport with the staff, and that there is evidence to substantiate the claim, but there remains a question about whether that could be put down to my attributes as an individual and researcher, or the school community’s openness and willingness to accept me as a temporary member. It is surely somewhere in the middle of that spectrum of causality.

There were a number of conscious strategies I adopted in order to build trust and rapport with the Thornton staff. The first of these was to make it clear that I was a teacher, with previous experience teaching in independent schools. In a previous research project in Canada involving ethnographic work in a school I had found it to be an invaluable asset that I could claim to be a teacher. I had rather consciously played up this feature of my past because it seemed to help the teachers accept me as ‘one of them’, when my Australian accent very definitely indicated that I was not ‘one of them’, that is a Canadian. I had framed this identification with them in the way I asked questions, referring to teachers as we/us/our. I adopted a similar approach at Thornton.

This conscious attempt to identify with informants has been well documented in other ethnographic studies. McDonald (1987) emphasized her heritage as a Celt in her study of Breton
language activists, in order to make a real connection with those she was studying. Wolcott (1973) and Beynon (1983) similarly played great store by their status as former teachers. My success in establishing myself as a colleague with similar interests and background to the teaching staff was evident in the way some teachers responded during the interviews or lunchtime discussions. Several people made comments acknowledging that they knew I was a teacher, such as well, you know what schools are like (Julian T13.5).

Knowing the language of teaching, particularly the language of teaching in secondary schools in Queensland, was a valuable entree card to lunchtime discussions on a variety of topics (Wolcott, 1973, p.12). The importance of making an effort to learn the language of the group being studied is acknowledged by Whyte (1943/1970) in his early study of Italian slum life in urban United States. He wrote that his efforts to “learn the language probably did more to establish the sincerity of my interest in the people than anything I could have told them of myself and my work. How could a researcher be planning to ‘criticize our people’ if he went to the lengths of learning the language?” (p.296).

Coming to terms with the language of teachers may be considered less of a challenge than learning Italian, but the particularities of the Queensland educational context demand some study in order to maintain an informality that is appropriate to lunchtime discourse. I therefore went into my fieldwork conscious of the advantages of ‘speaking the language’. I was, however, concerned not to go too far and risk over identifying with the teachers as workers, but certainly in the initial stages of interviewing I used my identity as a teacher as a valuable pathway towards securing people’s trust and confidence.
The benefits accruing from being familiar with the language and workplace of teachers are to some extent mitigated by problems which may occur when studying a familiar field site. In his discussion of methodological issues arising from fieldwork in a junior high school, Everhart (1977) argues that it is "extremely difficult to maintain the perspective of a "stranger" because the field worker is likely to have been socialized into the society or sub-society he intends to study" (p.2). It is possible for such a researcher to lose some of the critical eye necessary to document the commonplace and unquestioned.

The role of the researcher as a peripheral, marginal, transient, even 'alien' character in a school community or any research site has been well documented in the literature (Jackson, 1968/1990, p.xiv; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991; Van Maanen, 1991, p.31). Freilich's (1970) description of the role of the anthropologist successfully elaborates this point, despite its phallocentric perspective:

Irrespective of what role he assumes, the anthropologist remains a marginal man [sic] in the community, an outsider. No matter how skilled he is in the native tongue, how nimble in handling strange social relationships, how artistic in performing social and religious rituals, and how attached he is to local beliefs, goals and values, the anthropologist rarely deludes himself into thinking that many community members really regard him as one of them. (p.2)

Framed by the caveat that an ethnographic researcher can never be completely assimilated or accepted within a studied community, I believe that there was considerable evidence that I did successfully build a rapport and connection with the staff at Thornton. Some of the signs of this were superficial, but nonetheless significant, and others were more organic. It is not possible to establish whether the rapport was the result of my approach or whether it was a reflection of what Wolcott (1973, p.12) calls 'institutional cordiality', where any newcomer is made to feel welcome.
The openness and warmth the staff showed me gave me the confidence to take part in staffroom conversation, and enabled me to feel quite comfortable walking around the school grounds, where I was greeted by name by most members of staff I encountered. Delamont (1992, p.142) describes being incorporated into jokes as being a sign of achieving good rapport in the field. As I mentioned earlier, the table I interviewed from in the staff courtyard was referred to jovially by several people as ‘Carol’s office’, and I felt this was a sign of inclusion in the community.

There was considerable interest shown in my research and I read this as a sign of my acceptance in the community. It may well have been out of politeness, but when I sat down at a break time, someone would inevitably ask me how it was going, or someone would ask questions about why I was doing my doctorate in Canada, or about some aspect of the research. A conversational approach to one’s research may well have a positive influence on the establishment of rapport, as Lareau (1989) notes in her methodological appendix to her ethnographic study of home-school relationships. She found that such an approach was likely to “save many awkward moments, increase rapport with people in the field, and help prevent the problem of respondents feeling particularly ‘on stage’ when they begin to engage in the activities in which they know that you are interested” (p.194).

Toward the end of the field work, a number of people asked me about whether themes were emerging from the interviews and observations. I was quite open with people, and said yes, some significant themes had emerged, and I would select some of them and discuss them briefly. Wolcott (1973) experienced a similar interest in his work from his subject Edward Bell, and his response to this was to point out “some facets of what I had observed that might interest him (for
example, the use of space in the meeting, circumstances under which a meeting might or might not occur, and limitations placed by external factors” (p.6).

Attempts were made by a number of teachers to include me in a number of staff social activities. I was invited by one group to Friday afternoon drinks and a party one Friday night. Another member of staff asked for my phone number so that we could maintain contact. Although superficial, these incidents substantiate a picture that I was to some extent accepted by many staff members and that my presence was not overly intrusive or obtrusive.

I was quickly drawn to several teachers as friends. I am sure they felt the pull of potential friendship as well, as evidenced by the social invitations I received to dinners or after school get-togethers. I was very tempted to accept these invitations, but I felt rightly or wrongly, that I should not become too friendly with the staff. The ethnographer must balance the building of rapport and establishing relationships with individuals in the field, with the need to retain a critical perspective. Powdermaker (1966) uses the words “stranger” and “friend” to describe this complex relationship (see also Everhart, 1977). The ethnographic taboo against ‘going native’ is testimony to the delicateness of involvement in the community being studied. I felt truly challenged by this aspect of my fieldwork, particularly with regards to opportunities to build friendships with individuals at the school.

Other ethnographers have documented their discomfort with ‘friendship in the field’. Whyte (1943/1970) struggled with his position and decided that “while I sought to avoid influencing individuals or groups, I tried to be helpful in the way a friend is expected to help in Cornerville”
In his study of a school principal, Wolcott (1973) wrote that he was "conscious that ‘friendship’ could present another nagging problem....My conscious goal was to establish a role as a warm, sympathetic observer without making all the commitments of a long-term friend" (p.6).

Yet fieldwork should not necessarily be a barrier to the development of friendships, as acknowledged by Shaffir and Stebbins (1991), in their claim that “fieldwork, its rigors notwithstanding, offers many rewarding personal experiences. Among them are the often warm relations to be had with subjects and the challenges of understanding a new culture and overcoming anxieties” (p.4). Burgess (1991) argues that the friendships he developed during his time at Bishop McGregor School actually opened up situations for him as a researcher, as opposed to closing access to social situations (p.51). Oakley (1981) cites the long-term friendships she made with some of the women she interviewed, as examples of her establishment of rapport and achievement of reciprocity in the interviewer-interviewee relationship (p.46). Everhart (1977) mounts a convincing argument for building friendships in the field, in the interest of collecting “data which are qualitatively different than those obtained as a stranger” (p.13).

In retrospect, I think my reluctance to enter more deeply into friendships was based on a notion that I needed to separate myself from the staff so that I could see them as critically as possible. I think that ultimately it was recognition of the particularities of my own personality, in particular a tendency to enter friendships rather wholeheartedly, that prevented me from following up invitations to make more long-term connections with individuals at Thornton. Could I personally critically analyse what was happening at Thornton if I had become especially friendly with some members of the school community? The answer may well have been yes, but I felt more
comfortable in my role as researcher with the decision not to become involved in social activities outside of the school day.

Perhaps the strongest, and most important evidence of my success in establishing rapport with staff was the way people responded during interviews. Staff were firstly, very happy to be involved in the research, and when they came to the interview, almost all staff spoke with what I would interpret as great openness and willingness. There were also several instances where people asked my advice during interviews, which could be interpreted as a sign that I had built sufficient rapport and trust with the teachers that they sought my advice. I was, however, deeply troubled by two of these instances as the teachers were seeking advice about a problem in the school. I felt that I had crossed an ethical line by pausing, stopping the tape recorder and suggesting some strategies that these teachers could use in addressing the problem. My field notes read: “I am very aware of the difficulties of walking that tightrope between digging for data and laying the foundations for getting such data, and not getting too involved or manipulating the situation” (Field notes, 28.3.95).

Oakley (1981) offers some assistance in this regard with her acknowledgement that “an attitude of refusing to answer questions or offer any kind of personal feedback was not helpful in terms of the traditional goal of promoting rapport” (p.49). Griffin (1985) similarly notes that she was not a “passive recorder” in her study of young women, because the young women in her study “used” her as a source of information and as someone “to moan to” (p.108). In his study of students in a junior high school, Everhart (1977) encountered a similar situation to mine, and he justified the offering of advice to students as a “natural consequence of long term fieldwork” (p.9). He
observed that “people expect you to have opinions, they want to know how you think” (p.9). I attempted to rationalise my response as appropriate for an ethnographer with an interest in challenging inequitable power relations and maintaining rapport, but I remain cautious about the role of the researcher in such circumstances.

Whereas I detected little hesitance by teachers to be interviewed, I did sense a reluctance to allow me to observe in classrooms. The reluctance of teachers to admit outsiders into their classrooms points to constructions of teachers’ work as private and intimate, and reinforces the sense shared by teachers at Thornton that autonomy in their work in classrooms was very important to them (as will be discussed in chapter 4.1). This reluctance also raises allegations of isolation which will be explored in chapter 5.2. On the day after my initial presentation at the teachers’ meeting, and thus my first day in the field, I was approached by a teacher as I sat in the library looking through school magazines. She volunteered to be shadowed and interviewed and commended me on the way I had spoken at the teachers’ meeting, saying how nice it was to hear from someone who appeared to know what they were talking about. I later discovered that this comment had to be seen in relation to a previous researcher who had worked in the school and who had not been particularly successful in creating rapport with the staff. I arranged to shadow the teacher the following week. I decided to wait until I was better established in the school before approaching anyone else to be shadowed.

Cynicism expressed by teachers towards researchers or outside ‘experts’ is not unusual. Hammersley (1984) describes the teachers in an English school as having an “ambivalent attitude towards research and researchers. They were very dismissive of all ‘experts’, and there were
comments within my earshot about the irrelevance of theory and the importance of practice and experience” (p.49). Siskin (1994) found that some of the teachers in the three schools she was studying “had painful experiences with other research projects (and) many questioned their value” (p.41). The sanctity of the classroom will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.2, but it is sufficient at this stage to flag the cherished nature of the privacy of classroom teaching and the possible barriers this poses for researchers in schools.

Leaving the school was difficult. Before the Easter holiday period I had been tired and rather glad to come close to the end of my fieldwork, experiencing the fieldwork fatigue others have documented (Everhart, 1977, p.13). But on returning after a week’s break I felt quite refreshed and quite happy to spend more time in the field. I had reached a point at which it was natural to conclude, although as many have found, I could easily have justified - just one more week of observation, just one more follow-up interview, etc.

On the day I finished my fieldwork, I must admit that I virtually ‘slunk’ out of the school. I had run into Richard Simpson earlier in the day and had chatted to him about his cold, his interest in playing piano for a big band, and the fact that this was my final day in the school. I said goodbye to him in a very casual way, and made no other formal goodbyes at the school. This was partly because of my nature - I am not very good at saying goodbye to anyone, but also because I felt that I was not actually saying goodbye in a final sense. I was returning to the school later to seek their feedback to my work and I felt that there was no point in saying goodbye at this stage. I did, however, send the school staff a card to say thank you for ‘having me’. It read as follows:

To the staff of Thornton,
Many thanks for the warmth and openness you have shown me in the past months. I am
very grateful for the willingness you have all shown, to share your collective and individual knowledge and understandings of education. I conclude my fieldwork with some sense of loss - as you have made me feel very welcome in the Thornton community. I look forward to sharing my 'findings' with you all, and to your feedback on my work, later this year. Best wishes.

6. Analysis of data

In his novel, *The Telling of Lies* (1987), the Canadian novelist Timothy Findley writes of the essential idiosyncrasy of the process of interpretation:

The order of events - with all its obvious importance - depends on witnesses; on testimony. I testify according to my witness. Whatever happens to me creates my personal sense of order. Whatever happens next to someone else will, necessarily, create a different sense of order and, therefore, a different sequence of events. (p.131)

As I stated in the introductory section which addressed my understandings of critical ethnography, the process of interpretation and analysis of the dramas in the field is similarly subjective and conditional. No matter how well I support analysis with evidence drawn from interviews, school documents or observations, the view of the school remains mine. As Grumet (1988) concludes, “our work, no matter what its form, is not the seeing itself but a picture of the seeing” (p.61).

I began the fieldwork with a number of questions about teacher autonomy and related issues. I did not, therefore, enter the field as a tabula rasa, but rather began with a package of “orienting ideas” which were structured and did influence the collection of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.17). These ideas and questions directed the research to an extent, but I would still argue that the themes and analysis documented in this study ‘emerged’, and that my approach was largely inductive rather than deductive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). There were themes and codes which emerged in relation to the original questions which I did not predict, and I did not attempt to
force any preconceptions on to the emergent data.

I used a software package for qualitative data analysis developed at LaTrobe University in Melbourne, which is called NUD-IST (1995), an acronym for ‘nonnumerical, unstructured data in qualitative research through indexing, searching and theorising’. I entered all the interview transcripts and field notes as raw files into NUD-IST. I created a coding schema during the fieldwork and refined it during the transcription process. Like Wolcott (1973) I engaged in a “a long gestation period for reading, discussing, mulling, and weighing alternative ways to excerpt and catalogue the notes” (p.11) that had begun during the fieldwork. Armed with large sheets of blank paper I experimented with a number of code trees to find patterns or relationships in the codes that had emerged, before coding interviews and field notes in the NUD-IST program. There were ultimately 243 nodes or themes or codes in the tree for this project. Only a few of these were eliminated during the process of close analysis after leaving the field, and I think this was in part due to the opportunity provided during transcription, for refinement of the codes. After coding all the data, I printed out the entries at every node or code, which were also cross-referenced in directories in my word processing program, which I set up to store literature and ideas relevant to the emerging nodes. These printouts were filed in manila folders according to “parent nodes” and were stored in a portable filing box for easy access.

There is resistance and disquiet amongst some qualitative researchers in respect to the use of computer software such as NUD-IST for data analysis (Dey, 1993; Richards & Richards, 1987, p.28). Fears that qualitative research will be submerged in mechanistic strategies, whereby “the roles of creativity, intuition and insight in analysis are eclipsed in favour of a routine and
mechanical processing of data” (Dey, 1993, p.61) have been canvassed. Smith (1992) asks the question - “Does the increasing use of technology in analysis enhance scientific rigor, or does it inhibit intellectual and craft creativity?” (p.461). I think the caution expressed in this query is fair, but it also reflects a degree of conservatism of ethnographers, in the face of the opportunity to use tools such as NUD-IST to real advantage, and in a creative way. Ultimately, the computer is merely an instrument and the researcher is the artist.

By using NUD-IST I was freed from the overwhelming paper war that is inevitable with non-computer based coding approaches. It would have been impossible to achieve any degree of consistency in coding at 243 nodes or themes without the aid of the program. I have a suspicion that had I been coding ‘by hand’, I would have attempted to reduce the number of themes to a more manageable number, and thus risked losing some of the perspective in my portrait of the school. I was also comforted by the fact that my data existed in several forms and in different places - the original tapes, wordprocessor files, NUD-IST, and hard copy printouts, because the fear of losing it was quite daunting. By the conclusion of the study, I felt that the program had allowed me to focus on the analysis and writing up of data rather than spending time searching and checking for data, because all the materials were sorted and easily accessible.

7. Reciprocity and respondent feedback

I entered the negotiations with the school with the idea that I would like to offer the staff something in return for allowing me to conduct my research in their school. Reciprocity has long been acknowledged as a pragmatic way of achieving rapport (Everhart, 1977; Wax, 1952), but it is only more recently that it has attracted attention as a more idealistic goal for emancipatory and

The dilemma for the researcher with a commitment to reciprocity is finding a 'coinage' of real meaning to the research participants. Van Maanen (1991) argues that field workers must recognise that they cannot offer very much of obvious value to those who are studied (p.34). Deyhle et al (1992) argue that reciprocity may occur in a number of forms, but "one of the most important commodities exchanged involves the sharing of mutually beneficial bits of information" (p.627). Lightfoot (1983) implies a level of reciprocal 'usefulness' in her acknowledgement that one of the principals of the schools in her study, used her findings as the basis for a staff development day (p.376).

In my initial letter of contact, in subsequent phone calls to the school secretary, in a fax to the co-principal and in phone conversations with him, I made reference to the fact that I was eager to offer something to the school in return for allowing me to do research there. I explained that I would be happy to do something quite tangible for the school, beyond sharing my research findings with them. I had in mind the possibility of doing some supply/relief teaching for them at no charge, or some other work I could offer professionally.

In my first phone conversation with Richard Simpson, he assured me that they did not expect me to do anything for them and that the sharing of the findings would be all the school would expect of me. He repeated this in the first two phone conversations we had to discuss the research project. His expectations of our 'research bargain' were therefore limited to an expectation of
exchange of my findings. I made an offer to the deputy principal that I would be happy to step in and do some supply teaching for ‘free’ if they could use me. I repeated this offer to the teacher who takes responsibility for supervisions in the school, but at no time was I asked to fulfil my offer.

It was my intention to include member checks of my findings and analyses in this study. This goal was included as part of the research methodology on several grounds. Firstly, I felt that the real limitations of confidentiality and consent mean that participants should have the opportunity to withdraw their contribution to the study if they feel apprehensive. Secondly, checking back with participants is a significant way of achieving some level of correspondence between my interpretation of events and that of the participants. Finally, such checks are essential in a study which seeks to offer the ‘researched’ more of a voice in the process and findings of research (Ball in Burgess, 1984, p.90; Lather, 1991, p.64; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991, p.16).

There is, however, a danger in allowing respondents to ‘control’ or veto the interpretations of their comments that I offer as a researcher. I was mindful of the observations of Lightfoot (1983) and Borland (1991) on this issue. In her portraits of schools, Lightfoot cites a letter she wrote to one of the principals in her study about the role of member checks:

The work loses its power and honesty, I feel, if it becomes a consensus document. If a collection of people other than the author, have veto power, it loses the edge of criticism (in its best sense) that makes it useful to you and your colleagues, to researchers, and to other schools that may be coping with many of the same complex issues. (p.375)

Similarly, in her work with women’s life histories, Borland (1991) encountered a respondent who challenged her analysis of the interviewee’s responses. Borland was concerned not to appropriate the narratives of others by interpreting the original authorial intentions of particular comments.
But she concludes that as feminists we must not restrict our interpretations to those offered by our “subjects”, and that we must “attend to the multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings generated by our framing or contextualising of their oral narratives in new ways” (p.73).

I sought to give teachers at Thornton the opportunity to read selections from my study, in order to give some validation of my account, but also to acknowledge their role in the research process as something more than informants or subjects. I did not, however, agree that I would change any of my analysis were they not to endorse my findings. In acknowledging their feedback, but not resiling from my own analysis, I am in agreement with Delamont (1992) that “respondents’ knowledge is different from ethnographers’ knowledge, but not superior to it” (p.159) (See also Lareau, 1989, p.213).

To the end of seeking respondent feedback, I sent the senior administration team at Thornton a draft of the chapters of the study which focused on the school in the middle of September 1996. I then met with Richard Simpson, Paul Browning and Adele Mathews on November 1 to discuss their feedback.

Despite the fact that the following discussion preempts the analysis located within succeeding chapters of the thesis, I will briefly outline the respondent feedback I received. The three administrators were generally supportive of my analysis and conclusions. Richard Simpson led with a summary of their response, which was to say that the work was enlightening, perceptive, insightful and very well-written. He felt that it reflects a lot of what we would have seen here around us and that they had found it very useful to have an outsider’s critical analysis of the school. He felt, however, that I brought a particular philosophical approach to the analysis that
they would not apply themselves, one that was Neo-Marxist and feminist and that seemed to emphasise conflict rather than harmony. They felt that their essentially optimistic view of human beings, and their attempts to develop a school in which people's basic needs for belonging and shared vision could be met, did not come through strongly enough in the study. Richard emphasised that they were working from a conviction that if you merge certain human needs with the needs of an institution, like a school, you have a very powerful guiding perspective. He perceived that this thread did not emerge in my analysis.

They each offered corrections to a number of errors I had made in the detail of my description of the school, and then sought to clarify several issues. They began with discussion of the role of Adele in the senior administration team, and Richard expressed some concern that I had interpreted her position in the school to be less significant than the male co-principals. Richard felt that she was probably a more powerful deputy than most deputy principals in other schools, and that on some occasions she was in fact acting as a principal. In light of my observation that none of the senior administrators had postgraduate qualifications in education, Richard felt that I should note that he was now studying for a masters degree in education.

There were two major issues of concern to them arising out of the draft they read. The first was my representation of what I have called the ‘grooming incident’ (see chapter 5.1(i)). They felt that there was additional information that they had not given me at the time that they would like to have recorded, although they appreciated it would be unlikely to change my analysis. They explained that the grooming policy had been a very difficult decision for them, and was now one which they revisited each year. They had conducted considerable research into the 'uniform
policies' of other organisations in Brisbane, and discovered that no-one had arrived at a satisfactory resolution of gender equity and uniform consistency. Their decision was framed by a context of community expectations about school uniforms, in particular, parent expectations. They felt that they had strong support from the Thornton parents on this issue. Richard identified this issue as an example of the postmodern considerations facing school decision-makers in their struggle to reconcile so many arguably irreconcilable interests and concerns. Whilst they strove to be honest and open with students about the reasons for the policy, they had to cope with the challenge of ‘serving’ two client groups in this and so many other instances - students and parents.

The second issue of concern was their perception that a particular section of the analysis would have a damaging impact upon one individual in the school and possibly damage staff relations. I agreed to provide this person with the relevant section before giving the whole staff access to the document. I rang the individual concerned and explained that I had left the section at the front desk for him to read and respond to. Three days later I was notified by one of the co-principals that the individual felt that the section was defamatory and was considering taking legal action against me were I to include it. I agreed to meet with the administration team and the individual the following day.

As a result of the meeting I agreed to withdraw the section causing offence, although I expressed concern about doing so. Richard Simpson explained that he saw the issue as involving two competing, irreconcilable interests - my academic freedom and independence as a researcher, and the individual's professional reputation. I argued that there were other interests involved as well,
namely those of the teachers whose stories were to be removed. The administrators felt that some of those teachers might now, some eighteen months later, choose to change their comments, but it was felt that showing them the section would cause too many problems and harm in the school. There was clearly no possibility of a compromise position for the person concerned, so I agreed to remove the entire section. It was after this meeting that the administrators decided to change their minds about the use of the school’s name in the study. The following week I took a copy of the research to the school so that staff could also respond, but did not receive any responses from teachers in the school.

I learned much from this final contact with the school, including further insights into the dynamics of collaborative research. I had attempted to engage with the school and teachers in an open and collaborative manner, building in the opportunity for respondent feedback as a major stage in the research process. I had made it very clear to teachers and the administrators that whilst I would acknowledge and include their feedback in my research, I would not necessarily change any of my analysis. This foundation for a researcher-respondent relationship had apparently been accepted and reciprocated by administrators and teachers at the school. Despite my best efforts to communicate the nature and role of respondent feedback in this study, at least one respondent felt that his feedback functioned as an ultimate veto of the analysis. This difference in perception remains one of the great dilemmas of collaborative research approaches, because no matter how explicit the researcher may be about methodological agreements, a respondent may still object and seek recourse through some other channel, such as the legal system.

The threat of legal action by one of the teachers repositioned the researcher-respondent
relationship. My contact with personnel in the school prior to the final meeting had been characterised by a high degree of friendliness, collegiality and openness. Suddenly the dynamics of the relationship were refashioned in terms of threats, legalities and accusations about who was really the 'expert' in this situation (the respondent claimed to have sought legal advice and advice from a number of academics over night to support his case). The researcher-respondent relationship was reduced to a contestation about who was best positioned to wield the power in the relationship, whereas previously it had been a relationship between different but equal parties.

I was struck by the irony of the administrators' decision not to allow teachers to see the offending section. This was a school which had been established and was promoted as a 'teachers' school', yet the administrators were not prepared to allow teachers to make their own judgements about my analysis of the stories they had told me. Even though the concerned teacher had acknowledged the veracity of the stories I had been told, the teachers' stories were to be removed.

It is also difficult to overcome the inevitable time lag that besets most research. The data analysis and writing up are produced in a final form some time after the initial data collection. Much can have changed at the research site and participants' recollections of past events may become shaded or they may even reconstitute the past. In this study the process of respondent feedback began some 18 months after the initial data collection. Clearly, many changes had taken place in the school in that time. Administrators and the concerned respondent wished to deny the past, adopting what may be described as an 'anti-historical' stance, in preference for a present which they argued was quite different from that described in my study. Clearly, the researcher-
respondent relationship may be challenged by understandings of the nature and role of respondent feedback in the research process.

Chapter summary

The methodological approach adopted in this case study was a hybrid, drawing on insights, theory and practice from the scholarly literature in ethnography, critical ethnography and feminism. The ethnographic techniques of observation, interviews and document analysis were used for data collection.
CHAPTER THREE

THORNTON COLLEGE

This chapter positions Thornton College within a particular historical, social, philosophical and educational context. It begins with the background to the founding of the school. I then ‘take a walk’ around the school grounds. I build a profile of the teaching staff in relation to other teachers in Australia and explore the significance of Thornton as a school started by teachers. The school was founded on the basis of a clear philosophical framework and the tenets of its educational philosophy are discussed in light of practices and social relations I observed in 1995.

1. The founding of Thornton College

A frequent conversation starter in teachers’ staffrooms across the globe goes like this - ‘What we should do is start our own school’. It is an evocation that manifests itself out of a range of dissatisfactions, frustrations and ambitions, but it is one which is normally in the nature of rhetoric or fantasy, and is seldom acted upon. In the early 1980s, however, three teachers - Richard Simpson, Paul Browning and Bob Clancy, were working in a large, independent, boys’ school in Brisbane, and they acted upon their talk and set up their own school - Thornton College.

Bob Clancy saw his motivation arising out of a case of put up or shut up, after criticising a variety of policy and practice in his school. For Richard Simpson, his involvement was, as he describes it, the result of a midlife crisis. He explains:

_It was time to do something new and exciting. Bob Clancy had been Chaplain at [school name deleted] when I went there in 1972. He left a few years after that to go and do other things...but during that time he, and I and Paul and others, had talked about education a fair bit. We were young and idealistic and talked about the sorts of things we felt a school ought to have, as I think a lot of young teachers do. But in 1984, Bob had been away for quite awhile. He phoned, pretty much out of the blue and he said - do you want_
to have a go at this, I'd like to have a go, I want to get together and try to set up that school we were talking about. So in 1984, we got together and started to talk about it and plan it and it really went from there. A2.43

Richard, Bob and Paul, were joined as founders of the school by Richard’s wife, Rosemary Simpson, and Paul’s wife, Fran Browning. Rosemary describes her motivation for becoming so involved in the Thornton project as wanting a place for our own girls. She was not comfortable with the choices available for her daughters’ education, particularly the scarcity of coeducational independent schools in Brisbane. The commitment and energy necessary to establish a school was all encompassing, as reflected in Richard’s comment that I don’t think any of us would do it again because it consumed our lives (A2.63).

The group was committed to a collaborative, consultative model of operation for the prospective school, but it quickly became clear that one or two individuals would have to take on the responsibility for certain legal and bureaucratic responsibilities. Paul Browning explains that:

...it became clear very soon that there really needed to be somewhere where the buck stopped. There needed to be some person or persons for whom there was ultimate responsibility. Certain work had to be done, had to be followed up, people had to sign papers, and take some role and responsibility in putting their signatures on documents. And at that stage...both Richard and I were willing to give a commitment to the project...and say come hell or high water, we would stick with it as long as it was possible, as long as it was a viable project, and to give it 10 years or thereabouts to get it set up and running. A3.5

Paul took on the role of the principal, and Richard became the headmaster. Richard felt that this division occurred because it had been thought that Paul’s role would be more demanding than his own, but he expressed concern about the sexist connotations of his title and the problems which arose from the difference in titles. As a result, after a few years the two senior administrators became known as co-principals.
Adele Mathews was the successful applicant for a position which was originally called the senior assistant. It had been felt that because she was the deputy or assistant to both the headmaster and the principal, it was inappropriate for her to be called a deputy principal. Adele expressed dissatisfaction with her title as senior assistant, because it was open to interpretation as a clerical administrative position, and people outside the school had difficulties understanding her role in the school. Consequently, when Paul and Richard became co-principals, Adele became the deputy principal.

In 1984, the group became aware of a vacant property which had been the Anglican Boy’s Home. Negotiations with the Anglican church followed for the purchase of the property - a 9.5 acre/40,000m² block with a small cluster of twenty year old buildings. They were set beside playing fields owned by the Brisbane City Council, on the flood plain of a local water course. A loan from the Brisbane Anglican Diocese was negotiated for the purchase of the property, on what Bob Clancy described as *a commercial contract on favourable conditions*.

The group approached the Anglican Church because they thought that association with the church would assist their quest to establish a school. Negotiations with the Anglican church were, however, difficult. As Richard Simpson revealed:

"...it was a very political kind of process. We had to firstly come against the Anglican church to support us, that was much harder than we thought it would be...when we approached the Anglican church, we thought they would welcome us with open arms, but in fact there was a lot of suspicion. Especially among the clergy. You see the Anglican church’s governing body is the Diocesan Council. It’s a fairly large group and I think it can be a bit unwieldy. Certainly there was a few there, [who thought] that Anglican private schools are elitist and catering for the very top stratum of the socio-economic range, and that they preserve inequities in Australian society...there was a lot of ill feeling...So we lobbied...we worked pretty hard on that and got some rebuffs...but ultimately gained support. A2.87"
The support of the Anglican church was only the first step. For a new non-government school to receive funding from the Commonwealth government, a rigorous process as to viability of the prospective school, must be satisfied\(^1\). A detailed rationale must be submitted, at that time to the body called the Commonwealth Schools Commission (which was abolished in 1988 and replaced by the Schools Council). The *States’ Grants (Schools Assistance) Amendment Act (1985)*, stipulated that ‘new’ schools submit a proposal establishing the possible impact of their school on existing schools in the geographic area.

It was difficult for the founders of Thornton to prove that their proposed school would not affect community support for established schools, because the area was assessed to be a ‘non-growth area’ and already well-serviced by both state and non-government schools. The founders originally envisaged the school as having both primary and secondary levels, but the Commonwealth refused accreditation of a primary component because the area’s population was not growing. The school’s submission to the Commonwealth Government supported their establishment as a regional secondary school, on the basis of drawing students from growth areas outside the immediate feeder area, via the existing transportation links (a major rail/bus interchange) with more removed but rapidly developing suburbs.

The school was granted level 10 status on the Education Resource Indicator in 1986, which provided a recurrent grant of $1,258 per pupil (*Thornton Evaluation Report*\(^2\), 1992, p.93). This was originally on the basis of an enrolment 410 students, but in 1989 the school succeeded in gaining Commonwealth approval and funding for an increase to 524 students. As noted in a School Council report in the school magazine in 1993, the school “received significant funding so
that fees paid constitute two-fifths of the total cost of educating each student” (Reflections 7, 1993, p.8).

The founding group possessed or developed acute lobbying skills, becoming strong advocates for their own cause, and convincing other influential players of the merits of their case. They enlisted the support of the then Archbishop of Brisbane and a member of the Anglican Schools’ Commission, who were clearly instrumental in paving the way for the group’s eventual success. The Archbishop’s letter of support for the school concluded with the commendation that “I am impressed by the quality and value of the people who are putting the project together and I hope their ambition to make a significant contribution to the education patterns in this country can be fulfilled” (Thornton Evaluation Report, 1992, p.144).

Negotiations with the Anglican Church, the Schools’ Commission and the Catholic Education Commission (who had expressed initial concern that Thornton might take students from their proximate schools), were only part of the establishment process. The founders also embarked upon a community campaign to convince prospective parents to enrol their children at their new school:

...we organised public meetings at a number of places in those growth areas that we were targeting, on a Sunday morning. And went out there and we got write-ups in the local newspapers about our new school - a proposed new school was a good story. We got front page stories and went out there on Sunday mornings and hoped that people would turn up...And they did. Richard A2.553

The first public meeting was held in June 1985, at a local Anglican church. A steering committee was formed and two more public meetings were held to develop and gauge interest for the school in the region.
On 31 May 1986, some two years after beginning negotiations for the school, the Anglican Primate of Australia, Archbishop John Grindrod, KBE and Lady Grindrod, symbolically established the school, with the planting of a fig tree on the grounds of the property. The school took its first students in January 1987, with 90 Year 8s enrolling at the school, drawn from over forty primary schools throughout the greater Brisbane area (Reflections 6, 1992, p.4). The school began with a staff of four full-time and five part-time teachers. Thornton College became a full secondary school in 1991, with the first Year 12s graduating at the end of that year.

2. A walk through the school

The first thing I noted in my field notes about Thornton was the pleasing aesthetic effect of the school architecture and grounds (Field notes, 16.2.95). The entrance area to the school has a well-kept garden of Australian natives, and ample shaded seating along the school frontage. The low brick fence at the front of the school and the profusion of greenery combine to create an open and inviting facade. The school name is displayed on a large piece of hewn timber set up on posts, and is a surprising contrast to the traditional brass plaque greeting the visitor to many other independent schools in Brisbane.

The main administration building faces the street and is framed by a landscaped garden featuring several magnificent Jacaranda trees. The building is dark brown brick in Queensland Federation style with dark green and cream trim. I thought it must have been one of the original buildings of the old orphanage but I later discovered that it was in fact a relatively recent addition to the school, designed to meld in with the existing buildings.
The housing surrounding Thornton is not particularly affluent and is fairly untypical of Brisbane’s suburban housing. There is a prevalence of small red brick cottages of similar construction, in varying states of maintenance, which may have been constructed as Army homes at some point after World War Two. The Australian Army has a strong presence in the area because of the local location of a large army barracks, although few army children attend Thornton.

Neighbours to the east of the school, include a day-care centre, a parochial Catholic primary school and one campus of a Catholic coeducational secondary school. To the west of the school is a Scout Hall which backs on to a Memorial Park, a large area incorporating playing fields, which spill across a creek, and are owned and maintained by the Brisbane City Council.

The design of the school and the process to develop the design, have attempted to reflect the philosophy of the school’s founders. The priority of the building program was in the classroom and curriculum facilities, and as such, the administration building, which has become the hub of the school, was one of the last buildings erected. The administrators’ report in the school magazine for 1992 describes the desired effect of that building:

We believe that this building and the accompanying landscape are welcoming and warm: a genuine combination of dignity and informality where people can meet, and student displays can capture something of the spirit of the school for visitors. (*Reflections 6, 1992, p.5*)

It successfully lives up to those expectations. The foyer of the building is cross-like in design, with a thoroughfare feeding through from the entrance to the rest of the school. The administrators’ offices are situated off one arm, and staff and meeting rooms open off the opposite arm. It is an open and airy area with a floor of terracotta tiles and walls painted in a light, fresh green. It features high ceilings and two stained glass windows at the apex.
On the occasion of my first visit to the school, photographs of students engaged in a range of outdoor activities, including abseiling, rockclimbing and canoeing, were prominently displayed in the foyer. A large painting by a Canadian First Nations artist dominates one wall, a gift from Richard and Rosemary Simpson on their return from sabbatical in 1992. A life-size sculpture of four people extending their arms to the sky is positioned centrally, and pedestrian traffic dances around the piece. It bears a plaque with the title “Reaching for success” and is the work of a sculptor by the name of Richard Meredith who was sculptor-in-residence in the school in 1990. There is also artwork by a number of students in the foyer. The Year 12s of 1993 chose a unique parting gift to the school, in a large silver sword which is mounted in the foyer with a plaque, which reads - “We leave our mark. The Excalibur sword - a symbol of integrity, justice, equality.”

The main staff room is large and opens on to a small courtyard at the back. Staff each have a desk in small preparation rooms scattered throughout the school, so the staff common room has been established as a ‘work-free’ space. It is an area for socialising, eating, relaxing, and occasional meetings. There are two large refrigerators, a microwave, sinks, and two hot water urns along the western wall. Six large wooden tables are arranged in the room. Several French doors open out on to the courtyard at the rear of the staff room. It is a small, walled space furnished with green plastic chairs and several tables. It is only partially covered, and market umbrellas provide additional shelter. The few smokers on staff use this area.

A large staff noticeboard lines one wall of the common room, and it is here that much interaction between staff takes place. Supervisions are posted here, so all teaching staff check the board at the beginning of the day to see if they have a supervision for any period that day. I monitored the
staff noticeboard weekly during my fieldwork and found it a valuable source for insights into the school’s operation. At right angles to the noticeboard is a wall of staff pigeonholes. A phone for staff use is squeezed into a corner cubicle between the staff noticeboard and pigeonholes. There is also a photocopy machine in this corner, although most multiple copying is done in a small support centre elsewhere in the school.

The overall visual impact of the school is that it is low-level, although there are a number of two-storey buildings on the campus. This was a conscious design effect, as it was noted in the school evaluation that “the natural slope of the land has been utilised to give the school visual effect of a single storey complex” (Thornton Evaluation Report, 1992, p.87). Most buildings are linked by covered walkways, useful to facilitate continued movement on those days when sudden torrential downpours hit Brisbane. There are a few areas around the school which are in urgent need of landscaping, as students have forged temporary thoroughfares over eroding slopes because they are the shortest distance between some buildings.

In observing teachers in classrooms, I was somewhat surprised by the scarcity of adornment in many classrooms. There were few displays of student work or posters in classrooms. I wondered whether this was a result of having most teachers move from room to room, lesson after lesson, rather than having each teacher in a home room for most of his or her teaching day.

Classrooms, chairs and desks were largely graffiti free. I was in the school for the first term of the school year, and I thought it was possible that the scarcity of graffiti was the result of earnest cleaning over the school vacation. A teacher, however, shared the observation that there was little
graffiti in the school, and when she noted the appearance of a four-letter word on a desk she said it was *an aberration and a very rare sight in the school* (Field notes, 3.4.95). Thornton, however, has not been immune from graffiti; as successive action sheets from teachers’ meetings indicate that it has been a concern. Teachers are urged to remove graffiti immediately and use the perpetrators to do the cleaning (Teachers’ meeting action sheet, 13.9.93). I also thought that the school grounds were relatively litter free, although a frequent topic of conversation in the staff common room was the ongoing problem with rubbish around the school. The school evaluation also indicated that tidiness and rubbish had been a problem identified by some people interviewed (*Thornton Evaluation Report*, 1992, p.85).

Bells are not used at Thornton, so the immediate sound scape is dominated by very loud crows and other birds, rather than the periodic electronic prod. But the sounds of bells from neighbouring schools can be heard, as can the arrival of trains as they slow to a stop at the local station. Also absent was the invasion of the classroom by a public address system (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, p.135; Grant, 1988, p.140; Jackson, 1968/1990, p.16); what Sizer (1985) calls the “most malevolent intruder into the thinking taking place in public school classrooms” (1985, p.173).

The impact of the physical environment of a school on its culture cannot be underplayed or forgotten. In numerous studies of schools during the past twenty years, researchers have been most critical of the built environment of schools, particularly in the United States. Of the sample of American schools in his study, Goodlad (1984) observes that “only a few of the schools were architecturally pleasing - and then usually more by contrast with the ugliness of others than by
virtue of their own merits" (p.240). He asks the question - "Why should the workplace of teachers, children and youth be so sterile, and why do those in this workplace do so little about its aesthetic qualities?" (p.227). Sizer (1985; p.25) writes of schools in his study which were "predictable, airplane-hangar-modern, set among lawns and asphalt parking lots". Perrone (1985, p.646) notes that it appears that little "care was taken to create attractively aesthetic settings or to display curriculum imaginatively" in the schools he studied.

Thornton is not such a school. It has been deliberately designed with clear aesthetic and utilitarian goals and with a recognition of the importance of the built environment, as the following comment from the school evaluation indicates:

In a school where staff, parents and students have all had meaningful input into its development, the organisational and built environment are not merely a backdrop for the school's activities; they are in a very real sense, an expression of the priorities, attitudes and beliefs of the school community (Thornton Evaluation Report, 1992, p.74).

Testimony to the effectiveness of the physical environment of the school are the many comments from staff which identify the grounds and buildings as positive attributes of the school:

*It is a nice physical environment. It has pleasant surroundings. Alison S2.71*

*It is a pleasant atmosphere, a nice feel about it. The gardens are beautiful...but the concept of the actual design of the school is really nice, with the federation buildings and the gardens. They've all been designed to attract a lot of birds. Megan S3.70*

*When I first came to my interview, I was just really blown out by the grounds. I think more than any thing. From the main road, it's a pretty attractive and welcoming sight I think...It was just really welcoming and it was green and it looked as though it would be a nice place. Max T16.36*

*I love the campus - I really enjoy working in this environment...The buildings and grounds are pleasant to the eye. Harry T19.599*

As a visitor to Thornton, I too found the physical environment to be friendly and inviting. The
carefully considered balance of buildings and 'natural' landscape work well to 'deinstitutionalise' the environment. I was always aware that this was a school because of the students and teachers milling around the grounds, but I was not overwhelmed by the functionalism of the campus.

3. Profile of Thornton’s teachers

There were 45 teachers teaching at Thornton in the first semester of 1995, not including the three members of the senior administration team. Of these, 16 (36%) were men and 29 (64%) were women. Some 17 (38%) of the teaching staff were part-timers, one of whom was male. With such a large proportion of teachers working on a part-time basis, the interests and needs of part-timers are a significant issue in the school. A profile of the teaching staff at Thornton is represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of Thornton teaching staff, 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Admin</th>
<th>Subject Coordinator *</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Total Teaching Staff - Gender (inc. Snr Admin)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Subject coordinators have responsibility for a subject or subjects and I have included the positions called Student Advisor and Special Needs Advisor in this category as well.

The gender profile of the teaching staff has been the source of some comment on staff, and a number of male teachers made comments in their interviews pointing to what they saw as a
gender imbalance on staff favouring female representation:

*We have to get more good male staff, and that is starting to happen.* Bob T11.487

*I feel that there is a distinct lack of young male staff on the staff...you're limiting role models for students.* Max T16.123

*I think the people - I think first of all, it is predominantly a female staff. I was a bit surprised at that, but I have to say I think that is part of the dedication of the staff.* Monte T26.172

There are certainly fewer male teachers on staff than women, but the distribution of positions of administrative or added responsibility indicates that any imbalance which may exist, is to this point, favouring men. The two positions of principal are held by men, with a woman in the position of deputy principal. Subject co-ordinator positions were held by 25 members of the teaching staff - over half of the teachers, but the 36% of teachers who are men, held 52% (13) of these positions.

A gender breakdown of the teaching force in Australia shows that women make up 65% of the 202 400 teachers recorded in the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures (ABS, 1996, p.9). In Queensland non-government schools, almost 61% of teachers were female. These data do not, however, provide a gender breakdown that distinguishes between primary and secondary schools. Historically women have dominated primary teaching in Australia, whereas there has been more of a gender balance in the secondary. This representation of women in teaching is not maintained in the number of men and women holding positions of educational administration or management. In Queensland, women continue to be under-represented in such positions, compared to their representation in the total teaching force, and at one stage this decade their numbers in senior educational positions in schools were actually in decline (Limerick, 1991). The fact that men are over-represented in positions of management at Thornton, is, in light of the
greater context in Australia, perhaps unsurprising. What is surprising is that such an imbalance exists in a school which represents itself as avoiding traditional hierarchies, including gender hierarchies. This point will be further developed in chapter 5.1 and chapter 8.

In terms of an age profile of the teaching staff at Thornton, I have no accurate data because I did not ask teachers their age. Based on a superficial assessment of age, over 80% of Thornton’s teachers were between 30 and 50. There were only three people whom I judged to be under 30. I judged approximately 20 people to be between 30 and 40, and 18 people to be between 40 and 50. Less than 10 of the teaching staff would have been over 50 years of age. This rough profile of Thornton’s teachers indicates that they are clustered in the middle years of their working lives, with comparatively few very young teachers. This relatively aging teacher profile may have some bearing on the question of teachers’ perception of autonomy, as will be discussed in chapter 4.

Thornton was the first and only school for eight teachers on staff. Two of those teachers were founding staff who had been recruited by Richard and Paul as first year teachers in the first year of the school’s existence. A sizable proportion of the teaching staff (18) had come to Thornton with no other teaching experience in a non-government school. There were, however, nine teachers who had come to Thornton with only teaching experience in the non-government sector. A further seven teachers had teaching experience in both state and non-government secondary schools.

There has been a very low turnover of staff at the school in its first decade. Staff rarely move on once they accept a position at Thornton. Staff numbers have increased steadily over the past 10
years as the school has grown. Of the 45 teaching staff, 35 (78%) have been at the school for three or more years, and 30 (67%) have been at the school five or more years. In the profile of Australian teachers commissioned by the Australian College of Education in 1989, Logan et al (1990) found that “teachers who had served at their current school for less than five years accounted for 60% of the responses, with government schools recording higher staff turnover (62.7%) than either of the other two employing authorities (54.58%, 55.72%)” (p.12). Teaching staff who had been at Thornton less than five years only accounted for 29% of the total teaching staff, clear evidence of a very low staff turnover in the school. The question of staff stability is somewhat vexed, however, as there is some evidence to sustain the view that too much stability may result in complacency and stagnancy on a staff (Logan et al, 1990, p.15).

It is interesting to note a distinct networking pattern in the recruitment of teachers at Thornton. A significant number of teachers were recruited to the school from three particular schools in Brisbane. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are eight teachers, including the three founders, who had previous teaching experience at the same independent Anglican boys’ school. Recruitment by the founders of teachers from this school could be anticipated because they had some first-hand knowledge of teachers from that school. A second smaller group of three teaching staff had experience at an independent Anglican girls’ school, a ‘sister’ school to the boys’ school, and therefore again, a not unanticipated connection to Thornton and its Anglican network. Most interesting, was a grouping of staff drawn from a government secondary school in Brisbane’s northern suburbs. Some six teachers at Thornton had previous teaching experience at this school. The influence of the first teacher from this school to take up an offer of a position at Thornton, drew other teachers to apply for positions at Thornton as the school grew. His favourable
commendation of them to the co-principals undoubtedly played some part in their successful applications.

A number of the teaching staff came to teaching after successful careers in areas other than education. One teacher had been a plumber, one a publicity officer for a large charity, one a builder and manager. Logan et al (1990) report that almost half of the teaching force in Australia (45.6%) had experience working in occupations other than teaching, the most common occupational area being in professional and technical work. This goes some way to dispelling the frequently aired public conception that teachers know no working world but 'cloistered' educational institutions.

The study by Logan et al (1990) included an examination of teacher involvement in professional development, including award courses. They found that teachers in non-Catholic non-government schools had a higher percentage of honours and masters degrees than their Catholic school counterparts. I was quite struck when first browsing through Thornton school magazines, at the scarcity of postgraduate qualifications among the teaching staff - particularly at a masters level. In the school magazine for 1994, two teachers are shown as possessing master degrees in education. One teacher has a doctorate in nuclear physics, and the two clergymen on staff have Master of Arts degrees. No member of the senior administration team has a higher degree in education (although in the year after my fieldwork, Richard Simpson had enrolled in a masters degree in education). In keeping with the school's emphasis on outdoor education (which will be discussed in section 6(v) of this chapter), four teachers have graduate diplomas in outdoor education.
There is a cluster of possible explanations for what appears to be the low representation of staff with postgraduate qualifications. One is that decisions have been made at the selection stage about the preferred qualifications of applicants. Richard Simpson indicated that they did not place a high emphasis on the possession of formal qualifications in the selection process:

*It's very rare that someone with a Masters degree - that we would rate that higher than someone with a Bachelor's degree, above all we're looking for personal qualities that people will bring with their teaching expertise.* A2.601

Another possible explanation is that as a new school, Thornton has demanded of teachers a commitment in time and energy that has not allowed the pursuit of further formal studies, and that now the school has reached a certain maturity, staff are finding the time for formal study.

In light of the energetic promotion of professional development in the school (to be discussed in chapter 4.2(vii)), it is also conceivable that teachers are sufficiently stimulated by what occurs and is offered within the school environment, that they find no need for the external intellectual stimulation which may be offered through postgraduate studies. Monte had enrolled in a Masters of Educational Studies whilst teaching at his previous school:

*I was in a school where I was going no where. I felt I needed some stimulation, and that was one way of getting some stimulation ... There was a need for me to go and find out more about education, because I wasn't getting that at (my school).* T26.240

After some months at Thornton, he felt that the school offered him enough stimulation and that perhaps he would not have pursued such studies had he been at Thornton:

*Coming here, for the first year or two, I probably wouldn't have found a need for that, because there is a lot of stimulation here... So there are things here that would have given me a taste, I suppose of what a masters course could offer - but within a school structure.* T26.275
It is also conceivable that the belief held by some teachers that postgraduate qualifications in education are largely irrelevant and of little benefit to their practice (Davies & Seagren, 1992; Johnson, 1990a, p.262; Wolcott, 1973, p.202), is shared by teachers at Thornton. The sizable female part-time teaching force at Thornton, may also have an impact on the number of teachers pursuing further formal studies. It is possible that part-time women teachers are constrained by partners who are operating on the basis that the principal and full-time 'breadwinner' in the home is the male, and that any financial commitment to university studies should be provided to him, not the female partner who is working part-time.

A further explanation may be found in the age profile of the teaching staff at Thornton. In a study of classroom teachers and principals in a large northeastern American state, Monahan (1993) found that about a third of his respondents “did not begin to give serious consideration to their own professional development until three years after their first teaching assignment” (p.8). As I suggested earlier in this section, Thornton’s teaching staff is generally well beyond the first three years of their teaching experience, and the greater proportion of them are in the middle years of their working lives.

The relatively low number of teachers at Thornton with post-graduate qualifications appears to be going to change in the next five years. Three teachers had completed Masters in Educational Studies in 1995, and several teachers were enrolled in masters courses or inservice bachelor degrees in education. There was a real keenness among some of Thornton’s teachers to pursue further academic qualifications as indicated in the following comments:

*Like this year I started my Masters as well...I'm getting really excited about it...I went to a conference in September last year...and it was really interesting and it was the sort of*
things that I really wanted to get into with my teaching...and at that conference they told us about the Masters programme...And I thought, yeah, I'll apply for it. Rebecca T25.89

I also started my Masters in Education this year...I felt I needed some stimulation, and that was one way of getting some stimulation...The other thing is that having a Master in Education is going to be necessary for you to remain in the teaching profession really. Monte T26.235

...a lot had happened in (subject) education in the last five years and I just felt very old and rusty and I needed some sense of concentrated time just looking at what's happened in (subject) education - and I thought if I'm going to spend this time, I might as well do it for something that's going to give me a bit of paper or whatever, and so that's why I did it. Louisa T41.447

The more recent interest in postgraduate qualifications may reflect a broader interest and demand in the education community for postgraduate qualifications. This could be interpreted as a response to both the rapidly developing ethos of credentialism in teaching, and the more aggressive marketing drive by Queensland universities to ‘sell’ their postgraduate offerings.

There were three teachers who indicated that they were involved in professional subject associations, one of whom was heavily involved through his position as president of a subject association. There may have been more teachers who belonged to various subject associations, but they were not actively involved in their activities or professional development. The 1989 study of Australian teachers found that 37.8% of teachers belonged to a subject association, with a higher membership rate of 45.37% of teachers in non-Catholic non-government schools (Logan et al, 1989, p.39). This is not surprising, as teachers in the non-government sector can easily feel isolated from educational trends. The Department of Education tends to dictate approaches which are adopted by all schools, yet the professional development opportunities to keep abreast of educational changes are often not made available across sectors by the Department (see Appendix A for an outline of the Queensland educational context). Teachers in independent schools such as
Thornton, must establish their own networks and seek inservice to keep up-to-date with educational developments, and membership of subject associations is one way of achieving this.

The three members of the senior administration team and two of the teaching staff are members of the Australian College of Education (ACE). This national body was founded in 1959 as a professional association of people from all fields of education, with the goal of fostering educational thought and practice and promoting "the ethics of high professional responsibility" (ACE, 1982, p.2). Most administrators in the non-government sector belong to this association, but it does not appear to have attracted broad-based interest from classroom teachers.

A number of Thornton's teachers are involved in what are called, subject district and state panels and subcommittees under the auspices of the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS) (see Appendix A for an explanation of the BSSSS's role in Queensland). This involvement was seen as paramount by Thornton administrators and teachers, because it gave the school some input into policy decisions which have a major impact on the school's operation. The networking opportunities offered by this involvement were also important to Thornton teachers. Several teachers recognised that in meeting with teachers from other schools on panels, they can compare their work, in the form of assessment items and work programs, with that of their peers. This facet of teachers' work will be discussed further in chapter 6.1.

Logan et al (1990) found that the most common professional organisation membership for Australian teachers was of their relevant teachers' union. They report that 60% of Australian teachers were members of teachers' unions in 1989 (p.39). This picture was coloured by the
higher representation of teachers in the government education sectors (72.65%) than those teachers in Catholic schools (47.76%) or other non-government schools (40.94%). The relevant union for Thornton teachers is the Queensland Association of Teachers in Independent Schools (QATIS) (see chapter 6.2 for a discussion of the influence of the union on individual teacher autonomy). One of the union representatives at Thornton reported 37% of the teaching staff were members of the union by early in 1995. She felt that the numbers would increase to approximately 50% by the time the final deadline for membership in March passed.

4. Thornton - A teachers’ school

Thornton is not a school which grew from community or parental demands, nor was it established out of an initiative by a church bureaucracy. It is a school which grew initially from an educational vision shared by a small group of teachers. As the Thornton Information Booklet says, it is a school that was “founded and guided by teachers”. This in itself makes Thornton unique. It is a teachers’ school. This is declared with some pride in the background to the school offered in the Staff Handbook:

In most cases independent schools are governed by people who do not necessarily have much involvement with education, so this idea was quite novel and constitutes a major feature of the School. The teachers were attracted by the community school model and decided to use it as a structural guide in the establishment and management of the School. (Staff Handbook, p.4)

As teachers, the founders devised an organisational structure for their school which acknowledged the credibility of teachers and set out to give them a formal voice in the running of the school, beyond their classrooms, the curriculum and day-to-day issues. As noted in the Thornton Evaluation Report conducted in 1992, “it was agreed by the founders that direction, control and guidance of the school be vested in teachers with cooperation from the community
which the school served” (1992, p.76). Thus, the major governing body of the school, the School Council, was established in August 1986 with four positions for teacher representatives, to be elected by the staff (the School Council is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.3(v)).

In a conscious move away from the progressive perspective of totally child-centred education, Thornton was founded with the adult participants in mind as well as the students. Richard Simpson relates an allusion used by Roland Barth (1990) to exemplify this point:

...I think that the adults in a school are very important. It's not to say that the students aren't critical, but the students will come through and move on, but the teachers, most of them will stay. It's as much their community as it is the students' community. Roland Barth said something that struck home with me...He likens teachers in a school to the...flight attendants before the plane takes off - giving you your instructions about what happens if our oxygen level goes down. And they always say - if you have children, put the mask on yourself first, then look after the child. I think that's not a bad parallel. You just can't focus on the kids. A2.575

As a ‘teachers’ school’, a special flavour permeates the school culture. It is almost impossible to capture in words, but it can be seen in some tangible representations such as the school magazine, which is called Reflections. One of the first things which struck me about a number of the school magazines was the prominent positioning of the staff photograph on the first couple of pages. Whereas the staff photograph in other schools’ magazines can generally be found somewhere between the pages and pages of sporting teams, or not at all, since its inception Thornton’s Reflections has had the staff photograph on its first pages. This is a visible manifestation of the acknowledgement of the importance of teachers in school life.

I found another subtle reflection of the focus on teachers well after my fieldwork had ended. Towards the end of the school year, two teaching positions at Thornton for the 1996 school year
were advertised in the paper. Advertisements for teaching positions in Australia normally outline the teaching areas required and details of the position, but no information about the incumbent is given. It is usually only after many years of service at a very senior level in an independent school, that a teacher may be acknowledged in a position advertisement with a statement like - “After thirty years of faithful service, Miss Brown is retiring from her position as Headmistress of this school.” The advertisement from Thornton was striking because in the case of both positions, the person leaving was named and thus acknowledged individually. Such a public acknowledgement indicates the focus on the individual at the school - particularly the individual teacher, and the preparedness of the school administration to flag their commitment to teachers openly.

Thornton is also a school which projects teaching as a valued, if not the most valued, activity in the school. It may appear to be verging on a truism to state that teaching and learning are valued at an institution such as a school, but the normative practices of many schools lead me to conclude that a focus on teaching as the ‘core business’ of a school is not an unchallenged premise. In some schools the objects of value among staff are promoted positions or student success in sporting competitions or student success in externally validated examinations. For teaching to be valued as the central and unifying community purpose, a sustained philosophical commitment is vital. Little (1987) calls this sort of commitment to teaching a “public enterprise” and uses it as a criteria for a healthy, effective school (p.501).

There were numerous indicators of teaching being valued at Thornton. Monte spoke of his change of status from a position of added responsibility at another independent school to a position as a classroom teacher at Thornton:
I had a position of added responsibility at the other school, and now here I see myself as a classroom teacher apart from the committees that I have volunteered to be on. But even as a classroom teacher I am respected as a member of staff...and I think that is important. Because in systems that promote ranks in the school, people at the bottom can feel inadequate and feel like they’re just one of the workers, and just a cog in a big industry. Whereas no matter what position you play here, you feel like you have contributed to the growth of the school. T26.63

A further reflection of the commitment to teaching can be seen in the fact that all members of the senior leadership team maintain a teaching load despite the burden of their additional responsibilities. By continuing with classroom teaching, administration team members are positively enacting their desire to maintain a connection with the ‘core business’ of the school. This can also be interpreted as a tangible sign to teachers, that the administrators have not rejected the work of teachers because they find it unsatisfying or tedious.

Perhaps the most telling indictment of Thornton as a teachers’ school was the number of teachers who expressed the sentiment that Thornton was a great place to be a teacher, and that despite occasional difficult moments at the school, they would not be leaving Thornton in the foreseeable future:

...it's a great place to be a teacher... this will be the last place I teach. Samantha T28.457 and 537

I enjoy being at Thornton and I enjoy being a teacher. Amy T12.110

I will probably stay and teach here for a very long time. Julian T13.282

I have been here for quite some time...and I am happy to stay. Nina T21.537.

The day I left here would be the day I wasn’t going to be in teaching any more...I realize that I’m on to a good thing here. Vivian T34.578

I think if I did make a move, it would be out of teaching. I think as long as I’m teaching I think I’ll be quite happy to stay here. Unless a school with similar ideals popped up somewhere else, then I’d consider moving. Charles T35.505
Such comments are clear messages about teachers' perceptions of Thornton as a school and a workplace. Teachers are happy to teach there and consider themselves privileged to have obtained a position at the school. There is a sense that Thornton is a benchmark for these teachers, against which prior and future teaching experiences will be evaluated.

5. ‘The Thornton way’

I became aware during informal conversations and during interviews, of something which teachers and other staff members identified as the Thornton way. This phrase was used in a variety of contexts, but at its essence, the Thornton way was the shared philosophy and constructed meanings interpreted and accepted as the commonly understood culture of the school. Such meanings were summarised by Waller (1932) as the “we-feeling” of the school (p.13). Grant (1988) identifies the “ethos” of a school as the “sharing of attitudes, values, and beliefs that bond disparate individuals into a community” (p.117). He argues that the school ethos is “the spirit that actuates not just manners, but moral and intellectual attitudes, practices and ideals. In the case of a private school, it is the ideals represented by the parents and founders of the school or of the agency: for example, the church that took the leading role in its founding” (p.172). As an independent school, Thornton is arguably favourably positioned to achieve such a feeling within the school community. Johnson (1990a) argues that private schools are better able to build a sense of “symbolic glue” among staff. Teachers in such “typically independent, small, stable, and homogenous” schools, are better able to “agree on goals, champion hardy values, celebrate their successes, find direction in their history, and rekindle purpose with traditions. Public schools, by
comparison, are large and heterogenous and embedded in public bureaucracies” (Johnson, 1990a, p.220).

Richard Simpson described the Thornton way by way of calling upon a range of educational theorists, including Michael Fullan, Roland Barth, Karen Seashore Louis and Matthew Miles. From this theoretical base, he pulled the concept of “purposing”, which he explained:

Where you don’t set up a blueprint of where you want to be in five years, and how you’re going to get there step by step, but you constantly focus on your values. What are the important things? And you constantly try to have your planning and decision-making and everything you do, coming from that...and so, one of the things about the Thornton way of doing things is that we stop and we pause, and make sure our purposing is working and the we are pulling it together. A2.428

In my initial interview with Paul Browning, he used the phrase, the Thornton way of doing things, many times. In our second discussion he elaborated upon what he meant by that phrase, at first pointing to the school motto - In balance we grow - as an apt summary of the notion, and then by way of emphasizing the importance of a sense of community in the school. Bob Clancy spoke of the Thorntonian way in a brief speech he gave before taking long-service leave for a term. He used the phrase to refer to a cluster of attitudes and behaviour which he felt the school exemplified (Field notes, 24.4.95). Georgia phrased it in the following way:

We all have - we all know what we want to do. Like we know what the school stands for, we know what we’re trying to achieve here. People who have worked here for a long time, just know that, and that’s what they’re trying to do. T6.116

Melissa defined the Thornton way as a set of rules, a code of conduct:

The foundations have been pretty well laid. The rules - there’s no rules, but there are, if you know what I mean. The rule by which we live. It’s not so much a religious rule. OK, we’re living by what I feel is a religious rule...a code of conduct. T7.808

Absorbing the Thornton way is a complex process of subtle and overt influences and pressures
which may be summed up in the anthropological term ‘acculturation’. Siegel (1974) described this as the “process of culture change initiated by the continual interaction of individuals from two or more discrete groups and their cultures” involving controlling and subject groups (p.43). In relation to acculturation in schools, Waller (1932) argued that the process was “in part a spontaneous creation in the minds of those who identify themselves with the school and in part a carefully nurtured and sensitive growth” (p.13). Metz (1978) found in her study of two American junior secondary schools that a faculty culture grew in both schools as “new recruits to the school were socialized into it and continuing members reinforced one another in their adherence to common beliefs” (p.175).

The coining of a phrase or term to focus on a shared school culture is not an unusual practice in schools, as other schools I know of, have developed similar phrases or terms to explain ‘what they are about’. But it is more common in other schools for the focus to be on the sort of student the school seeks to ‘produce’ at the end of five years of secondary schooling. For example, at a Brisbane boys’ school called Villanova College, the boys are encouraged to behave like a ‘Villanovan’; just as at a girls’ school called Lourdes Hill College, the girls undergo acculturation over five years in the hope that they will become ‘Lourdanians’. The difference at Thornton, is that the Thornton way applies not only to students, but also to teachers. Thus, not only do students take on the particularities of this way, but teachers also undergo a process of acculturation to the school culture and philosophy.

Perhaps due to the youthfulness of the school, and an awareness that there is little tradition or history to rely on, a more conscious approach to socialisation or acculturation has been adopted
at Thornton. The administration team believes that the modelling of certain behaviours and approaches is central to the process of acculturation for teaching staff, particularly in venues such as teacher meetings. Richard noted that:

_It means modelling an ongoing commitment to learning and doing it in an environment of support. Kind of challenge and support._ A2.241

Adele Mathews commented on the role of modelling in developing a caring culture in the school:

_I think that when the school first started there was probably a tremendous...amount of modelling and then that was the core. I think that they all really had to support and help one another through. And then it has just grown._ A1.634

Beyond the modelling by senior administration is the teachers' more formal participation in collegial groups (small groups of teachers which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.3(iii)), committees (see chapter 4.3(iv)), and subject meetings. All of which build to create the "norms of collegiality" that Little (1982) documents in her study of effective schools (see also Fullan, 1992). The involvement of teachers in formal collegial interaction is complemented by informal interchanges in the staff common room and teacher preparation rooms, and much of this interaction serves to reinforce the dominant view of the Thornton way of doing things.

So, what messages about the Thornton way do the teaching staff ‘pick up’? Many are so familiar with the school’s mission statement and school motto, that they recited some part of these in their responses. Other teachers mentioned a range of values. Samantha identified _compassion...fairness...and educational zeal_ as the qualities valued highly at Thornton (T28.446). She described _educational zeal_ in terms of a school commitment to teacher professional development. Bob focused on the teaching approach of the Thornton way, in his assertion that the school’s philosophy was that teaching and learning should be _open ended, question centred and discovery based_ (T11.65). To one new teacher the Thornton way was the way he was expected to interact
with students and the particular approach to classroom management he felt he was expected to adopt. Adele Mathews had met with the new teachers the week before our interview and she tells of one teacher's early experience in the school:

...when he came to the school he thought that he raised his voice in class, and then he thought - oh, I don't think I'm supposed to do that here, because everything seems so casual and laid back. I've never heard anyone raise their voice. Like he picked it up immediately.

During my observations in the school, a number of precepts emerged as fundamental elements of the Thornton way - caring, community, collegiality or team work, individuality and choice.

That a school aims to be 'caring' is somewhat of a cliche but it is a quality which is held up universally by educators as a worthy goal. Noddings (1992) espouses an entire approach to education organised around “centers of care”, which includes a reorganisation of the curriculum and teaching methods in schools. She builds on the notion of an “ethic of care” initially arising from Gilligan’s (1982) hypothesis of the existence of a morality based on the recognition of needs, relation and response rather than moral reasoning (see also Larrabee, 1993; Grumet, 1988).

Caring for students is a constant in teachers’ conceptions of the elements that contribute to an effective learning environment and satisfying job (Hargreaves, 1994, p.145; Lortie, 1975, p.109). Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) found that “teachers seem intuitively to recognize that a caring relationship, as Noddings defined it, is a core element of a meaningful teaching-learning process” (p.228). That caring should extend beyond the bounds of the teacher-student relationship to encompass all members of the school community is perhaps too easily lost in the routines and busyness of schools.
A strong ethos of caring permeates the school culture at Thornton. It is a caring which encompasses both teachers and students, so that the emphasis in the school is on developing a 'caring culture' rather than individualistic concern for the students for whom one is responsible. This commitment is explicitly acknowledged as an element of the school's philosophy in the *Staff Handbook*:

"In a community people care about each other and try to translate this into action. Since the school began, staff have attempted to model this attitude in their relationships with each other and with their students: care is a natural part of everything we do." *(Staff Handbook, p.18)*

Although caring is an attribute which has been most commonly identified as a female virtue, particularly evident in female primary school teachers (Hargreaves, 1994, p.145), it is exhibited and explicitly valued by both men and women at Thornton (see Nias, 1989, p.41, for a similar finding). It must be acknowledged, however, that the high proportion of female teachers is more likely to have actively promoted a caring ethos in the school, than resisted it.

A number of women and men teachers emphasised the expansiveness of the school's caring ethos in their descriptions of the school culture, including the following:

*I think that for me, the caring thing, it would have to be the most caring place. And I've been in a few schools. This would have to be the most genuinely caring place...that I have ever been in.* Adele A1.625

*...we're a caring school first, foremost. (101) People around you, being there, supporting you, knowing what you're going through without you saying it. Again it's an unspoken things, but you know it's there.* Tess T1.774

*I don't think I've ever been in a more caring staff...you know - the excitement just before when we found out that three of the teachers are pregnant...just shows how everyone was really excited for them.* Chris T15.320

I observed an instance of 'caring' on my first day in the school. A teacher's child became seriously ill and required immediate hospitalisation. There was overwhelming support for the teacher in the
common room at lunch time on that day (and on following days) and several people volunteered to take her classes for the afternoon. I detected no reluctance or resentment from other teachers because they had to take on extra duties for the afternoon. Max commented on this incident some days later:

...if people have to leave in an emergency like happened the other day, then teachers just jump in and say - I'll take this, I'll do this, I'll go with you, etc. T16.144

The teacher involved in this incident greatly appreciated the response from her colleagues:

I had a month ago, on a Tuesday morning - my doctor rang me to say that my son needed to be taken to hospital. I had classes, but within five minutes I had people taking over my classes, I had someone to drive me to the doctor, I just felt totally supported. And you don't get that everywhere you work...this is really good.

There were other small but significant examples of a caring, supportive ethos - the celebration of staff birthdays with a cake; the celebration of teachers finishing degrees; the unsolicited exchange of 'warm fuzzies' when life gets difficult; the comfortable greeting of each other first thing in the morning; and the positive way in which students were greeted when they came to the door of the staff common room.

A very public manifestation of the caring and supportive ethos was the appearance on the staff noticeboard of notes thanking people for various things. The following selection of notes appeared on the noticeboard during my fieldwork:

Thank you for your contributions to a successful Interview Day on Saturday. We greatly appreciate all your efforts. (Field notes, 14.3.95)

95 Drama Camp
This camp was hugely successful! ...Thanks to Max, Hugh, Amy and Fran (who organised the whole thing) and thanks to Tom and Lorraine who visited us and lent their support. A top weekend. Frank. (Field notes, 27.3.95)

Thank you for your help both in organising students and in signing for areas....
P.S. Thank you Jan for completing the mind boggling task of transcribing on to master lists. Egads what a job! (Field notes, 3.4.95)

Public ‘thank yous’ were also forthcoming in teachers’ meetings. In my field notes from the first teachers’ meeting I attended, I wrote that:

Richard congratulated and thanked Harry for his work. Harry thanked Hazel for her contribution to the project. It is interesting to hear affirmation of staff work in a public setting. There is also ready acknowledgement by staff members of other people’s contributions. (Field notes, 20.2.95)

At a later teachers’ meeting, Bronwyn congratulated Maddy for her preparation of folders for the Interview Day. Paula reported on an Outdoor Education conference she had attended and my field notes recorded the following interchange:

Paula congratulated Phil and Michelle and the school community on the outdoor education program. She said that she had been proud to represent the school at this conference because the quality of the program was so good and so highly regarded. (Field notes, 13.3.95)

The action sheets from teachers’ meetings over the past four years are also dotted with ‘thank yous’ to staff, recorded in bold print.

Such affirmations do not go unnoticed, as a number of teachers commented on how much they valued the efforts made by senior administration and their colleagues to thank them for their contributions:

...they always thank us, which is nice. A notice will go up on the staff noticeboard if something really big has been accomplished at the school, and they always include the auxiliary staff, it is to all the staff. Megan S3.138

Little things like the administration putting up names on the Noticeboard saying how well, for example, the year 8 Information Evening for parents went... the thank yous up on the Board, the personal thank yous. Karlie T14.306

Whenever there’s a function, without a doubt there will be a notice up on the Noticeboard, usually from Adele, thanking specifically the people who have been involved, even though it’s part of their duty to be involved, there’s still the thank yous
and acknowledgement that you've done something the school appreciates. Sharon T30.62

That such 'thank yous' are highly prized by staff is no surprise in an occupation which has been acknowledged for its scarcity of extrinsic rewards (Goodlad, 1984, p.172; Lortie, 1975, p.130; Sizer, 1985, p.187; Waller, 1932, p.378).

When I probed to find out how the caring ethos found expression in the school, many people referred to the way teachers interact with students:

I often see teachers taking time to help students with problems outside of the classroom...The way they communicate with them in general when kids come to the door...the communication between teachers and students is of an open kind of friendly nature. Chris T15.308

Look, if a student is in crisis and a teacher is prepared to give a student their home phone number, which a number of them have, I think that's wonderful. Adele A1.402

The fact that we still have time for our kids. That any single one of us will drop everything to help a kid in trouble. That doesn't happen in other places I don't think. Tess T1.60

The caring nature of the school also encompassed a level of friendliness among staff that was commented upon by many people:

...the staff are friendly. And most people are easy to get along with - easy to work with. It is just a nice atmosphere. Megan S3.33

I've been in like, three different schools. Coming to Thornton was a lot easier than starting off in one of those other schools because I found that the staff were just so friendly and encouraging right from the start. Karlie T14.181

...there's that kind of general aura of friendliness about everybody which is nice. Barbara T2.615

The second theme which emerged as an integral element of the Thornton way, was the importance of building a sense of community. As the founders drew heavily on the literature about community schooling in framing their philosophy of Thornton, it is no surprise that 'community' is valued so
highly. It is one of the “key concepts at Thornton” outlined in the \textit{Staff Handbook}:

For the type of education we envisage to take place, the members of the School must see themselves as a community, and function as one ... the school attempts to function as a small community, fostering a dynamic relationship between itself and the wider community. The community will come into the school, and the school will go out into the wider community. \textit{(Staff Handbook, p.17)}

I asked Richard Simpson to explain what he meant by a \textit{community ethos}:

\begin{quote}
Where people know each other and work together to generate a bit of spirit that’s - a bit of synergy, that’s bigger than just the sum of the parts. And people know each other. Now, that’s even hard in a school this size to know...all the kids, but we can get close to it. Certainly caring for each other, by doing exciting things together as a team, such as in the outdoor program...the idea of helping each other, you know team work and co-operation, and that it really does generate power. \textit{A2.217}
\end{quote}

Paul Browning also stressed the importance of a sense of community as part of his idea of the \textit{Thornton way}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I suppose the Thornton way of doing things is recognising that we are in a community and there are different sorts of community here. I mean there is the community of the teachers, there is the community of the students, there is the community of the school, there is the community of the parents beyond, who don’t often come to this particular property. But an awareness of this community and a way of improving our human condition in this moment in time and at this moment in space. Through our interaction. A3.18}
\end{quote}

Teacher understandings of the term ‘community’ generally hinged on the expectation that teachers, students and parents will be supportive and supported. For Paul this sense of community arose out of sharing goals and philosophy:

\begin{quote}
Sense of community is vital. And sense of community for a staff reflects on the way students see the school too. If they see the staff being community minded and caring about what they’re doing, then they take that on board and think this may be worth while...A common goal, a common philosophy, there are other people interested in professional development there to assist you. Pick you up when you’re down, share some traumas with you, that sort of thing. Paul T35.60
\end{quote}

Bob saw community in the way people have a role in decision-making in the school:

\begin{quote}
...this is a community school. By that I mean that people have a feed-in to the way in
which decisions are made as well as to the decisions. T11.123

For Georgia, being a part of a community rather than merely a school was reflected in a preparedness to go that little bit further, not to limit her role as a student or teacher to what happens in the classroom, but to become involved in camps, drama, music, sports - the whole involvement of students (T6.619). Hugh's comment also picked up on community as an extension of the teacher's involvement beyond the classroom:

...the school is the school community. It's not just coming into the classroom, teaching the lessons, marking the work, seeing a few students and going home. It's once again, every cog that's working, it's being involved with collegial groups, and knowing where your curriculum is going. T17.237

In a similar vein, Rebecca told of the day she first came to Thornton for the interview for her position:

I remember walking into the school and ... they were all still hanging around school, and it was a quarter to four. I thought, what are these kids still doing here, at [school name deleted], we never see kids after school at all, and here's kids hanging around doing this and that and the other. It blew me away. T25.285

Comments by staff and my own observations attest to a well-developed sense of community at Thornton:

...there is definitely a community feeling here... I feel like I'm part of the place. Jane S7.159 and 318

I have a bigger sense of school as being more than just a place where I work...It's a community. Barbara T2.358

It is more a community - there is a feeling more of everyone is in it together, rather than a few running the school, and everyone else bowing and scraping and running around. Milly T3.164

According to its teachers, Thornton has succeeded in building a sense of community. This example of success is some answer to Hargreaves' (1994) concern, that "one of the greatest educational crises of the postmodern age is the collapse of the common school; a school tied to its
community and having a clear sense of the social and moral values it should instill" (p.58).

The third dimension of the Thornton way is the value placed on building a collegial culture and teamwork, which can be seen as natural extensions of the strong sense of community in the school. Traditionally, schools in the western world have not been founded or organised on the presumption of strong collegial interactions among teachers (cf. see Schwille (1993) for a number of studies dealing with the 'norms' of collegial working conditions in schools in China, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Rather, as argued by Smyth (1993), the majority of schools and school systems have relied on “directive, prescriptive and oppressive forms of control” (p.142). Donahoe (1993) argues that the “traditional school organization minimizes collective, collegial behavior on the part of teachers” (p.299). Thornton's emphasis on building a collegial culture reflects a strong push among researchers and practitioners in education for the development of collegial school cultures (Apple, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994; Hughes, 1987). Little (1987) summarises the benefits from such cultures:

When schools are organized to promote joint action, the advantages of collegial work groups are varied and substantial. Teachers' work as colleagues promises greater coherence and integration to the daily work of teaching. It equips individuals, groups and institutions for steady improvement. And it helps to organize the schools as an environment for learning to teach. (p.513)

The pressures mitigating against the development of such collegiality among teachers are great, and include the inflexibility of organisation in many schools, the lack of time to develop collegial relationships, and the resistance of teachers to engage in and commit to collegial structures (Cohen, 1976; Little, 1987).

Despite the many factors in schools which coalesce to hinder the development of collegiality,
most teachers at Thornton expressed a commitment to collegiality and a belief that it is working at the school. Teachers are expected to be able to function well in team situations. Formal structures such as the network of some 16 committees and the teacher collegial groups, form the backbone to the collegial approach which supports this aspect of the school ethos, and these will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.3. Thornton is a school which if measured against the items used to measure collegiality in the High School and Beyond ATS Study (see Siskin, 1994, p.105), would emerge as a strongly collegial school. Five items were selected by that study to contribute to an index of collegiality, which were whether:

- You can count on most staff members to help out anywhere, anytime - even though it may not be part of their official assignment.
- Teachers in this school are continually learning and seeking new ideas.
- There is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members.
- Staff members maintain high standards.
- This school seems like a big family; everyone is so close and cordial. (Siskin, 1994, p.105)

Thornton would rate highly on all of these items, as the evidence throughout this study shows.

In what could be construed as contradictory foci with the emphasis on team work and community, individuality and individual choice also emerged as values teachers identified as part of the Thornton way. Max felt that the ethos of Thornton was to care and to get to know and to treat everyone individually (T16.139). This value was particularly apparent in descriptions of the ways in which teachers treated students in the school. A number of support staff commented on their perception that teachers valued students as individuals:

*Well, there's more of a personal atmosphere here, there's a more personal aspect on each child.* Gwen S1.131

*I think what's valued here is the individual. The individual student to do well.* Megan S3.168

*I think the teachers our daughters have had, are on the whole...accept them as
individuals, that they are looking at them and their strengths and weaknesses as individual people. Lesley S8.339

For teachers, the pressure to conform to the Thornton way makes the commitment of the school to provision of choices for individuals, potentially fragile. This is explained by Barbara in her discussion of what she called the Thornton ethic:

It's kind of hard to put into words. But it's an attitude to people and to the community and to education. For example, I couldn't sort of start screaming at kids in the classroom and jumping up and down, and demanding my rights as a teacher. You know, you couldn't do that here. Other schools, possibly the teacher would have more freedom, but here, I don't actually know what would happen if you did it. But there's just a kind of restraint. It's difficult to put into words. It's not expressed. T2.310

There is therefore the prospect of considerable tension between the ostensible autonomy of teachers in the classroom and the pressure to conform to the Thornton way of conducting oneself as a teacher. It raises the possibility of what Hargreaves (1994) as "the heresy of individualism". He sets up a conflict for schools with strong, clearly articulated missions, between those who accept and adhere to the sense of mission, and those who question or doubt its veracity. He notes that:

If missions develop loyalty among the faithful and confidence among the committed, they also create heresy among those who question, differ and doubt. The narrower and more fervent the mission, the greater and more widespread the heresy. (p.163)

The teachers and administrators at Thornton are slowly coming to terms with the need to accommodate occasional challenges to the largely shared mission and goals of the school. This is a tension in the school which will be explored in more detail in chapter 5.

There would, however, appear to be a large degree of 'fit' between the teaching staff and the Thornton way. Based on my observations and the comments of a number of teachers, a clear
sense emerged of people committed to working together towards a shared vision:

*When I arrived, I (got) the feeling that I was in a room of people, all heading in the same direction. Samantha T28.313*

*I believe pretty firmly in the philosophy of the school. Ben T20.59*

*I love the philosophy of the school. Tania T27.50*

*I never worked with so many people who are so keen and who are - we all know what we want to do. Like we know what the school stands for, we know what we're trying to achieve here. Georgia T6.116*

The importance of sharing goals and an understanding of the school’s mission has been acknowledged in a number of studies (Hargreaves, 1994, p.163; Little, 1992; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rosenholtz, 1989). The importance of a shared educational vision to individual teacher autonomy is further developed in chapter 8.

Johnson (1990a) found that the teachers in the private schools in her study were more likely to express “clearer notions of their schools’ goals and purposes” than teachers in the public schools (p.219). This finding was connected to the ability of administrators in independent schools to select their own staff. Careful staff selection processes at Thornton clearly attempt to ensure a fit between prospective teaching staff and the school’s philosophy. Thornton’s administrators are in the position of being able to select staff, rather than having staff imposed upon them by an external bureaucracy. Despite recent moves towards school-based management, most principals of Queensland state secondary schools still only have very limited control of staff selection.

In the U.S. context early in the 1980s, Perrone (1985) reported that “administrators and teachers in the schools don’t select their colleagues; they are assigned people. Often, they lose teachers they don’t wish to lose. The uncertainties about staffing are enormously discouraging for
everyone" (p.7). In making his argument for school-site management and the decentralization of staffing decisions he claims that his study found that there was "little that was more debilitating to school morale than this sense of nonempowerment regarding staff appointments" (p.653). Sizer (1985) supports this conclusion:

Teachers are rarely consulted, much less given significant authority, over the rules and regulations governing the life of their school; these usually come from 'downtown'. Rarely do they have influence over who their immediate colleagues will be; again, 'downtown' decides. (p.184)

Darling-Hammond (1986) suggests that teacher control of, or input into the selection of teachers is a crucial element of a "professional conception of teaching" (p.544). She argues that such control "determines the degree of collective professional responsibility for subsequent teacher performance and the extent to which the preconditions for professional decision-making have been met" (p.544). Thus, by locating staff selection at a distance from the school, systemic administrators are removing the potential for school-based accountability for teacher performance. The ability of Thornton's administrators to select their own staff is therefore a strength on several counts.

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, the interview process at Thornton appears to be focused on a teacher's personal qualities, rather than their formal qualifications. Richard Simpson explained that:

...we structure our interviews very carefully to bring out whether they appear to be team people, how they view kids, how they view education and learning. You learn very quickly whether they see themselves as a source of all knowledge or whether they see themselves as very important facilitators in the growth of young people through adolescence. We've got our fairly clear attitudes to that which we don't shy away from. We structure the interview to bring that out in people. A2.605

It is possible that the limited focus on formal qualifications is in part an unconscious reflection of
the senior administrators’ lack of postgraduate qualifications, but the broader philosophical emphasis of the school is also an influence on their approach to staff selection. It was apparent to Chris that the administrators employ particular sorts of people at the school:

...they have obviously employed people who are aware people. You look at all the staff that are here - there wouldn’t be one of them who isn’t quite an aware person. T15.126

Monte contrasted the apparent selection criteria at Thornton with those he believed existed at his previous school:

...the school I’d been at, I think teachers were employed with other reasons in mind, particularly whether they look after some co-curricula activities. Whereas here, first and foremost, teachers are employed if they are supportive and show their support of the school philosophy. T26.175

The staff selection process clearly filters out some people who may not ‘fit in’ to the Thornton way, but there are still some people who suffer a degree of ‘culture shock’ on arrival at Thornton. As a member of the support staff, Gwen observed that some people initially found the contrast between Thornton and their previous school experience, quite disconcerting:

Again I can’t generalise - they all fit in well, but there are some who fit in easier than others. Some have come from a system which is fairly rigid probably, and they can’t quite get used to it, or it takes them a little time to get used to this slightly relaxed attitude that I think we’ve got here about some things...they stand back a bit, you can sort of see them standing back a bit and thinking about things, but it doesn’t take long. S1.430

Barbara experienced some of this ‘culture shock’ when she made the move to Thornton from a state secondary school:

I found a couple of times coming from a state school, and I’d sort of say something that was perhaps not suitable. And it would be very much a question of people saying something about commitment to the school, and professional collegiality and all these sorts of Thornton terms, and they’d be used to kind of, lessen my input. Possibly my ideas were garbage, but it was the terminology that was being used to kind of, to do it. T2.101

Hugh felt that there had been a subtle process of culling of staff who did not fit in or accept the
school's philosophy and practices:

I can recall staff who were here because they enjoyed the atmosphere, but I don't think they always wholeheartedly threw themselves into their teaching...and we tended to let those people just keep drifting through and eventually - it was culling themselves - they moved on. As the internal structure changed, and we kept inservicing, and changing the course of the school, and new theories were involved and extra things happened in the school, those people didn't feel that they fitted in. They moved on. T17.28

Barbara also spoke of her perception that people who don't fit in, just kind of end up going. (T2.334)

Thornton shapes people. Tess endorsed the success of the selection process and the shaping process in her statement that:

...certain types of people are employed by Thornton and then they evolve in a Thorntonian way, once they're here. T1.747

Max had been on staff for some years, but he recalled that the thing that struck him on first arriving at the school, had been the way people had been prepared to lend a hand. He reflected further on this and noted that:

...people can get shaped into - if people are here long enough, I think they tend to forget what it's like on the outside. T16.105

The characterisation of the world beyond Thornton as the outside, is a significant positioning of the school and the individual. Such a statement is open to at least two, quite contrary interpretations. On the one hand, the school is seen as encompassing a protective and caring culture - the inside being constructed as safe and secure; and on the other, as a reflection of a cloying isolationism, verging on xenophobia. I saw little evidence of the latter interpretation in my time at Thornton. In fact, my observations tend to support the conclusion that teachers and administrators looked outwards, both in their involvements in broader educational issues and organisations, and in their awareness of the wider educational and social context of their school
philosophy. This is not to say that teachers and administrators are not fiercely protective of the *Thornton way*, particularly those people with a stake in the early years of the school’s evolution. One of the tensions bubbling in the school, was that as the school has grown, new interpretations of the *Thornton way* have surfaced. These were not necessarily in accordance with the initial mission or flavour of the school, and were open to interpretation as challenges to the status quo.

Hugh points to this in the following comment:

...they thought it was changing the vision of the school. But I guess it is like anyone who has a baby, it becomes theirs, and they feel proud of it, and I guess you want to hang on to that. But things change all the time and you just have to accept the changes...I think they [the foundation staff] originally saw new people as children coming into it, and they were going to bring them up in the way to behave in the way that we should. Not meaning that in the sense of this - this is authority and this is the way it’s done - but to let it seep through in a gentle way. T17.4

The observation that ‘Thornton shapes people’ begs the question - How much success do the teachers have in shaping Thornton? This is surely implicit in the difficulties some teachers have had in reconciling their own teaching and educational philosophy, with that which they encounter at Thornton. It also raises the question of whether the *Thornton way* is a dynamic and malleable vision and philosophy or one that is set in stone. Fullan (1992) warns principals of the danger of “overattachment to particular philosophies or innovations” because of the risk of the restriction of alternatives, and the suppression of the voices of teachers who may proffer such alternatives (p.19).

One of the founders of Thornton, Bob Clancy, was well aware of the tensions which had emerged in recent years between the ideas of new staff and the tenets espoused by the school in its embryonic stages. He clearly sees that some changes are inevitable in the *Thornton way*, as he indicates in the following comment:
I think we also need to just pause to look at what we're doing... I think we probably need to share a bit more I think, of not just what we're doing, but when will we need to shift. I mean, old fogies like me might have to drop off. Because where the community and the educational needs of the community impinge on the philosophy, we have to say - well is this a relevant philosophy now? T11.68

He later reflected that:

...all visions are temporary, I think. Because they are replaced by better ones or worse ones and they also have to be shared visions. T11.564

Tess also acknowledged the evolutionary nature of the Thornton way:

...it means the culture of the place has to evolve, which is a good thing. The fact that is evolutionary, that it is going through changes and various phases. T1.97

Despite Bob's apparent acceptance of the inevitability of some change, he and others who treasure the early manifestations of the Thornton way, are not going to let go of their vision without a fight. It seemed to me, and to a number of teachers on staff, that there are many facets of school practice and philosophy which are simply not negotiable. This tension throws a shadow over Thornton as an experiment in teacher autonomy and collegiality and will be discussed in chapter 5.1.

I found the Thornton way to be reflected in a number of quite tangible manifestations. One of these was the school's approach to advertising. Unlike other relatively recently established independent schools in Brisbane, Thornton has chosen, quite deliberately, to adopt a promotional approach which is low-key. Richard Simpson was quite vehement about the importance of reflecting the school's philosophy in the way they advertised themselves, especially the need to highlight the values the school treasures in their advertising material:

...we talked with advertising agencies...about the most effective form of advertising...ultimately the product will sell by word of mouth...There are key messages that we've identified - we've had a student, parent and teacher committee that we've called the Communication group, and one of its major roles was to identify the key
messages about the school that we wanted to get out and to talk about how we would get them out there and we found that the most effective was the local newspapers. A2.230

In 1995, one of the school’s librarians was given the task of coordinating the school’s publicity. She spoke of promoting the school in such a way which would try to show we offer a very balanced education. The school had consciously shied away from an American P.R. hard sell approach, preferring to adopt a more localised ambit, focused on presenting us as a community that cares.

The school has not advertised at any of the Independent School Expos which have become an annual event in Brisbane, nor do they aggressively market themselves in the Brisbane press as some independent schools have chosen to do. (One independent boys’ school has taken to running a weekly column in the weekend pages of The Courier-Mail, the local Brisbane paper.) As Richard Simpson indicated, however, they do use the locally distributed free newspapers to place advertising and information about school activities. An advertisement for the school appeared in a 1995 edition of the local north side paper called the Northern News. This advertisement exemplified several aspects of the Thornton way. There was a strong focus on the school motto and emblem in the advertisement. The motto was in quite large print in the advertisement, unlike those of other schools advertising in the same ‘Private Schools’ feature. It was also surrounded with considerable white space, so that the eye was drawn to the text of the school motto rather than glancing over it. Below the motto and emblem were two photographs - one indicating the emphasis on outdoor education in the school, with a boy and a girl with backpacks looking forward from a mountain top. The other photograph showed an image of the kind that Richard Simpson had described to me in an interview, of the human face of technology in education. It showed a teacher with two students, again one of either sex, working with books,
folders and notebook computers. This photograph was interesting in light of comments made by Richard:

*You won't ever see an article from us in the vein of [school name deleted] one about everyone having a laptop...because to us that's much less relevant than what the kids are actually learning about technology and how it's empowering them, not what wonderful stuff it is...if we've got a photograph, it's about people, and communication - if we get a photograph, we'll try to set it up with a boy and a girl and a teacher and they will be doing something. And our article will be about what they're doing and what they're learning from it, and the values that lie behind it... That's what we mean by strategic publicity. A2.290*

The text accompanying the photographs reads:

These are changing times. Changes in work and leisure have transformed our lifestyle, creating economic, political, social and psychological pressures that affect everyone. In preparing your people for all of this so they can live active, fulfilling lives, we see certain things as important: the need to value high quality life-long learning; the need to be an effective member of the community; the need for balance in our lives; and the need to understand ourselves and to develop our talents.  

*Northern News, March 21, 1996*

This text clearly focused on change, and the need for students to be prepared at school for coping with change. Four goals or values were identified as being especially treasured at Thornton, but none of these focused on academic success to the exclusion of other goals, a sharp contrast to the advertising strategies adopted by other independent schools in Brisbane which do focus strongly on academic success. The advertisement ended with a statement inferring that Thornton is different and seeking to take a socially aware and active stance as an educational institutional - *That's what we're about at Thornton - we can't change the world, but we can make a difference.* Prospective parents and students are provided with a picture of Thornton which points to a progressive approach to education, and a focus on the individual student coupled with encouragement of local and global community membership.
The more formal expression of the Thornton way is found in its mission statement and motto. This mission statement appears in the Staff Handbook and it states that:

We at Thornton strive to foster a balanced philosophy of integrated personal, spiritual, intellectual and physical growth. Through this we aim to empower people to live confidently, capably, sensitively and creatively in the global community, and to contribute to its direction. (Staff Handbook, p.9)

Thornton’s school motto is “In balance we grow”; and it represents the foundation of their school philosophy. Symes (1996) argues that such mottos are powerful exhortations of a school’s philosophy and that they “play a role in galvanising school energy around a point of textual identification” (p.1) (See also Barman, 1984, p.99). Thornton has succeeded in using its motto to activate such energy.

Unlike the situation at many schools where you would be greeted with a blank stare if you asked teachers to recite the school motto, staff at Thornton are well aware of it and have an understanding of its practical implications for the way the school is operated. The motto was referred to without prompt by almost 20% of the staff during the course of interviews. I would have anticipated that members of the administration team would refer to the school motto, and they did. Richard Simpson referred to it several times during interviews, using it as a philosophical framework for a variety of issues. Paul Browning felt that the way the school approached professional development was summed up in the motto, a further indication that this is a school with a strong teacher focus:

I suppose it is summed up well in the motto - In balance we grow - and the implications that has. And to me some of the implications are - I think this is critical as an implication - growth implies you are not now where you are going to be in 12 months or 12 years time. Growth implies development, and it applies obviously to students who come in at Year 8 and progress through to Year 12, but it applies equally in our minds to the adults in the community as well. A3.8
The motto is a constant reference point in the administration reports in school magazines over the short history of the school. In a piece in the magazine espousing the need to see education as a lifelong process, the motto is seen as providing a sound framework for the school well into the twenty-first century:

In Balance We Grow remains our underlying philosophy. It enables us to establish and develop fundamental values, beliefs and norms while encouraging the flexibility and responsiveness that are critical to a successful institution as it approaches the 21st century. (Reflections 7, 1993, p.5)

The application of the motto to staff contexts as well as student learning contexts was supported by a number of staff. Amy described the personal growth she had experienced since she came to the school as a teacher, and referred to the motto in the course of her reflection:

...that's, I think, a really large amount of personal growth that I've undergone in that time and I think that's really what it's all about, being at Thornton. That it allows you as a person to grow, you're not only encouraging the children "in balance we grow", but we're very much ourselves encouraged to grow. T12.155

Some staff had absorbed the school philosophy so successfully that the motto emerged in an integrated way in their responses. Sharon explained that she really appreciated the motto at Thornton. She identified a difference between Thornton and other schools, in that although many schools would give lip service to such a motto, Thornton was prepared to make the motto a focus here...resources and priorities go toward that, whereas other schools allowed their mottos to become incidental (T30.141). Keith had been a founding member of staff and he summarised his understanding of the vision the school was begun with:

Well, it's the balanced growth across - you know - balance. We are not just here for academia...it's the cultural aspect as well and the practical aspects as well. T10.68

Bob applied the spirit of the motto to the school's enrolment policy:

...I would hope that since our enrolment policy is first enrolled, first in, unless there is a
learning difficulty for which we haven't got the resources, then it implies...that anybody ought to be able to grow, unless there are difficulties that are revealed as time goes on. T11.219

A number of other teachers mentioned the motto during their responses:

*I like the philosophy of balance. Charles T35.412*

...we've got the idea of the balanced growth, which is the idea of the spiritual, the physical, the intellectual, the growth - and the fact that we operate as a community. Georgia T6.608

*I think we hope to show that we offer a balanced education because of the type of school we are. Melissa T7.674*

The Thornton way and the more formally expressed school mission and motto, clearly position the school community within a particular philosophical context. There is strong evidence of a shared understanding by the teaching staff of the school’s educational philosophy which is reflected in a range of practices and social relations I observed at the school.

5. Philosophy in practice

The founders of the school gave practical expression to their philosophy through several formative decisions about the way the school was to operate. Several of these features of the school, make it unique among Queensland schools. These include their policy on fees, the nature of their affiliation with the Anglican Church, and policies on competitive sports and student leadership.

(i) Enrolment policy and fees

Great efforts have been made to achieve consistency between the rhetoric of Thornton’s philosophy and the operational policies of everyday school life. One area in which this is apparent
is the school’s enrolment policy. The school has a policy statement on the issue of offering places to students:

The policy is based on the principle of “first in first served”. Students are offered places in order of the date of receipt of the Application for Enrolment form.

There are three provisos associated with this policy:
(i) As far as is possible, an equal ratio of girls to boys is maintained.
(ii) Parent expectations and student needs will be discussed at an interview before the student wishes to attend. These need to be clearly compatible with the philosophy and values of the school.
(iii) Students with special needs are included on the basis that these students’ needs and parental expectations can be reasonably met by the school’s human and physical resources.

(Policy statement for offering places to students at Thornton)

Bob explains how the school enrolment policy connects to the broader philosophy of the school:

...since our enrolment policy is first enrolled, first in, unless there is a learning difficulty for which we haven’t got the resources, then it implies... that anybody ought to be able to grow, unless there are difficulties that are revealed as time goes on, for which the student can’t adjust, and that has happened. T11.219

In contrast to many other independent schools in Queensland, Thornton does not have an entrance examination for incoming students.

The founders of the school decided not to offer scholarships, which I thought was rather strange in light of the active social justice and equity agenda I saw in so many aspects of the school’s life (see chapter 4.2). Rosemary Simpson explained what she felt was behind the founders’ thinking on this issue:

So that we just accepted kids, first come first served was very important. Private schools have to bear the elitist tag anyway, and once you have scholarships you change your agenda. There’s been a bit of a push, there was a push for excellence in Arts pursuits - Art, Drama...We don’t want to become a school for any one thing, it’s a balanced education. T18.44

The Thornton Evaluation Report also mentioned the school’s policy on bursaries or scholarships:

There is no provision for bursaries or fee reductions since these would add to the fee burden of other families. A user-pays system exists. This allows the maintenance of a fee
structure which makes the school accessible to children from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances. (1992, p.94)

The fees set by the School Council reflect an attempt to make the school accessible to a broader cross-section of the community than would normally send their children to a private school. The fee structure at Thornton is therefore set at the lower end of the range for non-Catholic independent schools in Queensland. Thornton's fees for 1996 were $2,860 for the year. Fees to attend Queensland independent schools tend to be lower than those in the southern states of Australia. In 1996 there was a $4,000* per annum difference between Sydney Grammar School and its comparable school in Brisbane, Brisbane Grammar School. Thornton sets its tuition fees well below the large, well-established independent schools in Queensland. A number of Thornton teachers came to the school from a large Anglican boy's school, where fees for 1996 were set at $5,820 per annum. Most of the well-established independent, non-Catholic schools in Brisbane had fees for 1996 in the mid $5,000 range. Thornton's fee structure is more comparable to other recently established Anglican schools in the wider Brisbane area, such as West Moreton Anglican College ($3,250 - $960 of which was tax-deductible building levy), and Cannon Hill Anglican College ($2,560).

(ii) Anglican School

Thornton is an Anglican school, in the sense that it is affiliated with the Anglican Church of Australia through the Church Institutions Canon. The influence of the Anglican Church is, however, limited. This is so in both the governance of the school and the style of religious observance adopted. In terms of governance, it is the School Council which has the power to

* Australian dollars
direct the school's future, although the Archbishop has a representative who is an ex-officio member of the School Council. Paul Browning represents the school at the Anglican Schools Commission which is a loose affiliation of Anglican schools in Queensland. This organisation provides a secretariat to members and has most recently taken an active role as the schools' industrial representative in the enterprise bargaining negotiations with the independent teachers' union. Where the school adopts a policy decision advocated by the Anglican Schools Commission, it does so by the choice of the co-principals or School Council, not because it is bound to any particular systemic or diocesan decision.

In terms of religious observance in the school, my sense was that this was a school which was humanist in philosophy and ritualistic observances. It is arguable that this is the approach adopted by most mainstream denominational schools in Australia, as the increasing secularisation of the community reduces the demand for a doctrinal religious education. As the School Chaplain noted:

*I would say basically, the people who founded this school came from the good old Anglican school system, where religion is a peripheral veneer on the surface, basically a high quality humanist system of education, where religion has a very low priority indeed.*

The perspective that Thornton is a strongly humanist school operating within a liberal Christian framework was shared by many staff. Bob quipped that somebody had said to him that the school would be more appropriately called the Thornton Buddhist School. Rosemary Simpson had previously taught at an Anglican girl's school, and she had not wanted Thornton to emulate the religious environment of such schools:

*I believe that I can live in a Christian way and espouse the principles of a whole lot of religions.* TII8.22

One of the teachers of the subject, Personal and Spiritual Development, felt that his approach tended to de-emphasise the 'spiritual' side of the subject, preferring to teach it as a subject called
Human Relations Education, which is taught in state schools (Field notes, 2.5.95).

When I suggested to Richard Simpson and Paul Browning that the school was strongly humanist in tone, both accepted such an interpretation of their school’s philosophical foundations and practices. Richard articulated this in terms of his aspirations for the students at Thornton:

...It's just really a sort of personal articulation of where - what I would hope we've been able to help kids do. They're humanist again, but they're very Christian. A2.318

And in a later interview he observed that:

The culture and the philosophy of the school comes through overtly as very humanist. A2.287

Paul recalled a recent meeting with other Heads of Anglican schools at which they were asked to think about what was Anglican about their schools. He began by listing what he described as the structural reflections of the school’s Anglican character:

I mean the Anglicanism comes through at the specific structural level, in our having a chaplain, in the students going to worship one morning a week, in our having an oratory as an area of quiet, where [the chaplain] also has services from time to time. In our having various events through the school year, religious ones and school ones, which are given a religious framework in their commemoration and celebration. It's done through the students... having religious studies as part of their curriculum. A3.574

He then paused and reflected on the distinction between Anglicanism and a broader Christian foundation:

...we very quickly move into a debate about where Anglicanism ends and where Christianity begins, and then where Christianity ends and maybe humanism or a fundamental respect for human values and life begins.

Paul has spent several holidays trekking in Nepal, has photographs of the area on his office wall, and an obvious interest in Buddhism and other eastern philosophies and faiths. He argued that the differences between different religions were infinitesimal compared with the commonalities, and
that he was particularly interested in such things. The goal at Thornton was not to turn out a long line of Anglican sausages, and he thought that students go away from this school with a greater respect for Anglicanism and Christianity in general, than they do at other schools. (A3.591)

The school literature reflects the humanist leanings of the school’s philosophy. In the Information Booklet under the title “Spiritual Growth”, it is explained that:

At Thornton we see spiritual growth as a pilgrimage: a journey during which one is faced with many assertions and pressures, choices and decisions...It is our conviction that learning and growth do not take place in a situation in which a prescribed set of dogma is presented as fact for students to accept without question. Rather, we see Christianity as being presented as a part of the ongoing life of the School in a very practical sense. (Thornton Information Booklet, p.6)

This message is reinforced in the student handbook in a section outlining what ‘Anglican’ means:

We are fully integrated with the support organisation of Anglican schools in the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane. We are a Christian school; we have a responsibility to teach the Christian faith, discovering faith by the Anglican route, but do not force undigested dogma or set religious routines on people. We welcome people of other traditions without reserve. (Welcome to Thornton College, p.2)

(iii) A coeducational school

An extension of the philosophy of balanced growth in the individual student is the founders’ decision to establish a coeducational institution. Many of the teaching staff have taught in single-sex schools, and there was a consensus amongst the staff that coeducation was a preferred educational option. Paul Browning commented on the importance of coeducation in the school culture:

...this is where I see the value of Thornton education, and most especially the coed side, being so immensely evident. I am still amazed at how confident the kids are in that situation, by the time they get up to Year 11 and 12, how naturally they relate together. A3.89
Several of the staff were also parents of students at Thornton, and they explained that being a coeducational school was a major influence on their decision to send their children to Thornton:

_Someone told us about Thornton being coed and small, and that really appealed to both of us, because coed to us was the way to go, because that's your preparation for life._

_I definitely wanted a coed school. That is one of the things that I'm a very strong believer in - coed schools. I came from a coed school myself and I felt that in my career...that was a big help to me._

_I liked the coed, that aspect of it...I'd...done supply teaching in all boys' schools...but I didn't really like that concept. I didn't like the chauvinism that it breeds and the old boy image...We're fostering gender equity in our home and I really wanted it to go into a coed situation._

The official documentation of the school addresses coeducation. The _Information Booklet_ devotes a section to the coeducational aspect of the school, focusing on the school’s desire to “create situations that facilitate natural, respectful relationships between the sexes” (p.17). The _Staff Handbook_ provides teachers with a way of conveying to students the school’s expectations for their behaviour:

...we have often suggested that they are “professional students”, and that school can be seen as their workplace. With this in mind, we ask boys and girls who develop more serious personal relationships with each other to regard these as private, and not publicly display their affection for each other on the way to or from school, or at school. (_Staff Handbook_, p.21)

(iv) Non-Competitive Sport

Competitive sport is a cultural lynchpin of independent schools in Queensland, particularly for boys’ schools. Most of the founders of Thornton had their most immediate teaching experience in an Anglican boys’ school which prides itself on its success in a range of competitive sports. This ethos did not appeal to them, and in founding Thornton they chose to avoid the traditional emphasis on competitive sport, and rather to focus on physical activities which engender co-
operation. Paul Browning was reported in a Brisbane newspaper as saying:

We are not against the idea of competitive sport...but our philosophy is that we do not involve the school in organised inter-school competitions. The reason is, basically, that in many cases the level of competition encouraged in inter-school sport has developed to an undesirable intensity. (*The Sunday Mail*, 30 January, 1994, p.145)

The lack of school supported competitive sports does not mean the school does not facilitate and promote physical activity, as is clear from the sports policy:

An important feature of Thornton is the development of a Physical Recreation program which involves physical fitness, outdoor activities, environmental awareness and a wide range of team games. For two main reasons, the school is not involved in regular organised competitive sporting competition:

1. The founders of the school believe that co-operation and teamwork are more powerful than individual competition, and that skills and attitudes in these areas are particularly relevant in the modern world.
2. Organised competitive sport is already very well catered for in the community, and we encourage our sportsmen and sportswomen to be involved there. This frees up time at school for co-curricular activities which would otherwise not be experienced.

Competition is not rejected outright, as it obviously plays an important role in the wider community. Rather, we see a need to provide balance in the area of physical growth, and such a course can best achieve this. (Parent Information Letter, March, 1995, p.2)

The Physical Education co-ordinator outlined the essence of the program as he perceived it:

...our final goal is to get students involved in some healthy pursuit outside of school, where they continue it and they make a habit of it, and they lead a healthy, active lifestyle. In essence, that's what we're trying to achieve.

Ann described the physical activities offered by staff as part of the program they call 'Project Active':

...we offer a variety of out of school activities...there are a whole variety of things like gymnastics, wall climbing, basketball, netball, fencing, orienteering...and also lunchtime sporting competitions within the school. T3.10

It is compulsory for students in Years 8 and 9 to take part in at least one activity per semester, and older students are encouraged to continue their involvement during the latter years of schooling and beyond. The school also encourages students to join local suburban sporting clubs,
which Paul Browning argues are traditionally in competition with schools for participants (*Sunday Mail*, 30 January, 1994, p.145).

A number of teachers identified problems arising out of this policy, in particular, the absence of school spirit and unity which they felt may have arisen because the school does not compete against other schools in sport. The importance of activities such as sports was recognised by Goodlad (1984) in his claim that “it is the extra curriculum of team sports and student government and so on, not the regular academic program, that provides opportunity for working toward shared goals, contributing to group solutions, achieving through a division of labor, and experiencing success as a member of a group” (p.266). Goodlad goes on to add a criticism of such activities, as he argues that the value of sport was constrained by the level of inherent competition and the selective participation by students.

Nina felt that the lack of competitive sport can be isolating for Thornton students:

...they feel that they don’t compete against other schools, that is a perception that they have perhaps - that they want the school to be out there, and there is no forum for them to be sort of mixing with other students. T21.478

Joyce felt the students were missing out on something worthwhile:

...it would be nice for kids to have some kind of team spirit going within the school. With a small amount of sport. I’m not saying a huge - I’m not in favour of competition at all in a big way, but I just think - I mean, I look at other private schools who have that component and I’d just like something of that. T4.800

Melissa struggled with her opposition to what she called the *jock mentality* of many schools, and a way to satisfy the need for the school to have contact with other schools. She toyed with the idea of joint school productions or debating:

...I would like to see us meeting other schools in a situation where we are not pitted
against each other, but certainly show what we can do. And I don’t know what that is yet. That’s a real problem if you don’t have competitive sport. T7.1391

Janice also bemoaned the lack of school spirit:

...the school is trying to develop, trying to work on school spirit because we don’t have school sport...but I’d like there to be more interest given to organisation of interschool sport within the structures of the school, or the musical, different things that might build school spirit. We don’t have a lot of opportunities to do that. T43.479

Lucy had a sense that the predominant focus on team work had a detrimental impact on individual motivation among the students:

...not having competitive sport, I think they don’t - there’s no real fighting spirit...I’m not saying it’s bad for them, but everything here is so much team work. I think that was the first thing that I really noticed. That everybody is working together to achieve things, not individually...I see it as good that team work and supportiveness is fostered, but I think that in real life, sometimes you need to fight to get something. T45.301

A small group of male students expressed similar sentiments to these teachers in their submission to the school evaluation 1992. The report notes that “a small group of boys were extremely insistent in their demands for interschool competitive sport to develop some school spirit” (Thornton Evaluation Report, 1992, p.42).

On my first visit to a classroom with Adele Mathews, I was introduced to a class of Year 12s and invited to explain why I had chosen Thornton as a research site. I told the students that I had heard interesting things about the school, and that it had a good reputation in the educational community. Adele later explained that it was good for them to hear what outsiders have to say about Thornton, because the absence of interschool competitive sport meant that the students did not get a lot of opportunities for comparison with other schools (Field notes, 22.2.95).

The absence of school involvement in competitive sport has a positive consequence for the
working conditions of teachers, in that they are not expected to supervise or coach a sport on Saturdays. Participation in a ‘Saturday sport’ is a common expectation of staff in other independent schools, particularly boys’ schools. It is not unusual for an independent school to require a teacher to take one sport each term. Carley spoke of Saturday sport in relation to the workloads of teachers at Thornton. She felt that teachers worked very hard at Thornton but that one of the ‘tradeoffs’ for that was the absence of Saturday sport:

...we don't have any Saturday sports. And coming from a place where I worked a lot of Saturdays, from very early in the morning or I was there at seven o'clock in the morning doing netball training, or 6 at night doing netball training, I know what is the potential length of the school day...so I don't think we are working any harder here than teachers out there in other schools. T40.206

The Teachers’ Award- Non-Governmental Schools stipulates that extracurricular duties include “the supervision of school sports, clubs within the school, cadet training, etc.”, and that such duties “shall be voluntary and honorary and shall be arranged by agreement between the teachers and the school authority” (QATIS, 1987, p.10). Most independent schools are dependent upon the good faith and dedication of their staff in the interpretation of the “voluntary and honorary” clause of the award.

(v) Outdoor Education

In rejecting the inclusion of competitive sports as the major physical co-curricula endeavour, the founders did not reject the importance of physical activity, nor the socialising potential of physical pursuits. Phil Marks established and coordinated the outdoor education program until the end of 1995, and he tells the story of the program’s birth:

*Fortunately, Richard lives opposite my parents, and Richard knows my parents pretty well. Richard was at a party about two years prior to this school opening, and at that party - I had probably only finished my course [in outdoor education] the year before, so it would have been ‘84 - and I was just talking to Richard at the party about the idea*
of outdoor education, the value of it. He was talking about the unique idea that they had for Thornton, of not having a lot of competitive sport, but wanting to look at offering something different. And I felt that outdoor education would be perfect for the school. So a couple of weeks after that evening, I met Paul Browning, Bob Clancy and Rosemary Simpson, and the four of us sat down and had a chat about what I felt an outdoor education could do for the students at a possible Thornton, if it ever got started. Of course it did, and I started just doing some things for the grade 8s.

The Outdoor Education program at the school has clearly become a major source of pride for the founders and current staff. Photographs of students engaged in outdoor education activities adorn the walls of the foyer to the school. Richard and Paul were at pains to draw my attention to the program at my first appointment with them to discuss my research. A number of teachers referred to the program as one of the school's strengths. The school employs two full-time outdoor education specialists to run a comprehensive developmental program catering for students from Years 8 to 12.

An information evening for Year 8 parents gave me a useful introduction to the Outdoor Education program. Phil Marks outlined the philosophy of the program, emphasising that it was not meant to set individuals against the environment but was about trying to help students learn to live with the environment. The motto of the program is Challenge by choice. His view was that students come into secondary school with too many crutches, and that this program was about providing them with the strategies and opportunities to become independent and take responsibility for their own lives (Field notes, 28.2.95).

Unlike most independent schools in Brisbane, Thornton has adopted a 'mobile outdoor education philosophy', offering students outdoor opportunities at a number of national parks in Queensland. Many private schools have made large financial commitments to purchase land to
develop outdoor education centres, around which programs are based. Phil Marks has a clear
conviction that such an approach is not productive:

...my belief of outdoor education is that it should be taught in the outdoors, for the
outdoors and for the development of yourself and of others around you. And I don't
believe that can be done in a centre...So many of the private schools have set up centres
which are huge white elephants and just as this big symbol of their own success, without
really analysing what they were hoping to do in outdoor education...the biggest expense
we have is buses...we don't have all the other little problems of rates and that sort of
thing, but the good thing is that it gives us the ability to be flexible. We can go where we
want, when we want, and we can move around and certainly expose the kids to different
environments...Kids get bored and I think everyone learning, needs to be stimulated by
new things.

The current program includes activity days of abseiling, rock climbing, orienteering, ropes
courses, kayaking and canoeing; and camps of two to four days duration for students at each year
level.

(vi) Student Leadership

In establishing Thornton, the founders made a commitment to ‘flat’ leadership structures, which
will be discussed in chapter 5.1. In keeping with this commitment, Thornton has not adopted the
traditional prefect system of student leadership which has evolved in English public schools, and
which is so familiar in most Australian independent schools. All Year 12 students are invited to
accept leadership and responsibility roles in the school and there is a Student Representative
Council made up of two representatives from each class in the school. A Thornton teacher
explained the philosophy in a report in a local newspaper:

This is more effective than a prefect system...We believe that everyone has leadership
qualities, and one of our roles is to provide opportunities for students to discover this in
themselves, and to help them accept the responsibilities that go with it. (The Village
Pump, 1993, p.23)

As a young school the student leadership approach has obviously taken some time to take root as
a workable tradition, but Spreull made mention of the success of this year’s group:

...this year it is the best year for the SRC. You don’t notice it very much, but I see all over the place, these Year 12s doing this and that, doing all they’ve agreed to do as their responsibility for this year. And I think it’s working very well. T29.170

Monte had come to Thornton from a very regimented independent boys’ school and he had undergone a quite dramatic change in attitudes to students as a result of the Thornton approach to student leadership:

I’ve learnt that if you give students responsibility they will rise to the occasion...my background was such that - no, we won’t let the students do that because they won’t do it properly. We’ll have to do it - the staff. So, to see that’s not true, that students can do it if you let them have the freedom to do it, and they will rise to the occasion...That’s enabled me to put more faith in people that I come into contact within the classroom. T26.223

The Presentation of Senior Badges is clearly a major ritual in the school year. Both Adele Mathews and Richard Simpson encouraged me to attend this event. I interviewed Richard Simpson on the day of the Leadership Ceremony and he stressed its significance to the school community:

Today’s ceremony - I hope you’ll see some really strong dimensions of community. The word might not even be mentioned, I don’t know, but I hope you’ll see that. Help, caring for each other, supporting each other, cooperating - that kind of thing. A2.260

It is not easy to create a sense of ceremony and import in a large gymnasium with over 500 students sitting on the floor, but on walking into the Thornton gym it was clear that both students, parents and teachers valued the symbolism of the morning. The School Chaplain officiated at the ceremony, which coincided with Ash Wednesday. He spoke of the different concept of school leadership at Thornton. Paul Browning addressed the assembly (having temporarily put aside his task as school photographer), stressing the importance of the ceremony in the school calendar, and explaining the symbolism of the event. He spoke of the school’s goal to put into practice our philosophy and the Thornton way of doing things. The Senior badges were blessed by the
chaplain and their significance was explained by Richard Simpson, using the words - sign of action, sign of leadership, sign of example, sign of service. The Year 12s were handed their badges by the members of the SRC, in a sign that their leadership is granted, not by the teachers or the administrators, but by students from lower year levels (Field notes, 1.3.95).

One of the most striking features of the event was the way everything was explained to the students. Each symbolic moment was contextualised in language which most students would be able to understand easily. Constant reference was made to why things are done in a particular way at Thornton. Whether this comes as a consequence of the youthfulness of the ritual, and thus the need to be creating ritual rather than merely reenacting it, or whether it is a result of the philosophical commitment to making actions relevant and meaningful to students, it is difficult to say. The measure of such ceremonial purpose and meaning will perhaps be more appropriately made in twenty years time when the school is more established and the founders have left.

Chapter summary
Thornton was founded on the basis of a clearly articulated educational vision. That vision has come to be expressed formal signs of the school such as the mission and motto, but also importantly, in a more informal but extremely powerful notion - the Thornton way. This cluster of shared meanings and understandings has evolved as the school has grown. The Thornton way has been successfully promoted by the senior administrators and accepted by teachers, through the modelling of behaviours and attitudes such as caring, collegiality and teamwork, community and individuality; processes of staff selection; and advertising. The school's policies on enrolments, non-competitive sport, outdoor education and student leadership have also come to
embody the Thornton way of doing things.
CHAPTER FOUR  TEACHER UNDERSTANDINGS OF AUTONOMY

This chapter explores the ways in which teachers at Thornton understood autonomy in their work as teachers. These teachers identified an understanding and experience of three levels of autonomy - in their work in classrooms, in their life and working conditions in the school, and in their voice in the decision-making processes of the school.

1. Work in the classroom

Teachers at Thornton identified autonomy in their classroom as the most significant and cherished facet of autonomy in their work. The importance of classroom autonomy should not be downplayed. It would be easy to dismiss this area as superficial and trivial in the bigger picture of power relations in a school or in an education system. But for teachers, most of whom can expect to spend all of their careers as classroom teachers (Hughes, 1991, p.5), control over what they teach, how they teach, and how they discipline students is at the very heart of their security of identity as autonomous workers. The teacher-student relationship which is the core of classroom interaction, is also, as suggested by Little (1987), “the major obligation to which teachers are held and the primary source of rewards in teaching” (p.493).

Teachers at Thornton shared the perspectives of teachers in Johnson’s (1990a) study, who “spoke eloquently, even passionately, about their need for autonomy in teaching...A number of respondents said that they would not continue to teach if they lost autonomy in their classrooms” (p.134). The discretion and control they had in their classroom were seen by the teachers in Johnson’s study to be non-negotiable, and “although they regretted being excluded from policy
making outside the classroom, it was far more tolerable than having their day-to-day work prescribed by others" (p.183). Autonomy in relation to curriculum decisions was also found to be significant to first year teachers in the U.S. in Sclan's (1993) study. It was found that those teachers who experienced autonomy and discretion in relation to curriculum decisions and approaches to teaching and discipline methods were happy with their choice of teaching as a career and planned to stay in teaching (p.13).

Teachers at Thornton strongly defended their rights to maintain classroom autonomy, which they perceived to range over four areas - control of subject content, style of teaching, discipline of students, and for those teachers with a coordination role, control of a subject budget.

(i) Control of subject content

Teachers at Thornton perceived that they had autonomy over what they taught in their classrooms. The following comments are strong evidence of this high level of perceived classroom autonomy:

"I don't like to be told... I've been given so much freedom here with the program. James T24.447"

"...you've got control over what you're virtually doing in the classroom, you've got control over a lot of the things that influence that. Georgia T6.641"

"I guess I can just follow the way I like to do things. Mary T8.620"

"The classroom is your domain. Ben T20.299"

"I feel the autonomy I have is really only with my classes and the subject matter that I teach in. Nina T21.103"

"I'd say we're reasonably independent for our classroom stuff. Ann T3.349"

"I mean, I work at my own programs, I do what I like. I don't have to show anyone what"
In comparison with teachers in other states, Queensland teachers have been in an enviable position in terms of control of curriculum and assessment in secondary schools because of the state’s adoption of school-based assessment (see Appendix A for an overview of the Queensland educational context). The move from public examinations to a system of internal moderated school assessment in secondary schools took place in the early seventies following recommendations by the *Radford Report* (1970). This represented a revolutionary shift in education in Queensland (if not Australia), as it marked the shift of curricular responsibility from external agencies, to schools and teachers. The only other education system in Australia to adopt school-based assessment to such an extent has been the Australian Capital Territory. The system of school-based assessment has changed dramatically over the past quarter century, but successive reviews of the Queensland education system have supported its continuation in principle (Scott (1978), Ahern (1979), Viviani (1990), Wiltshire et al (1994)).

In October 1992, the Queensland Cabinet commissioned a *Review of the Queensland School Curriculum*, chaired by Professor Ken Wiltshire. The Wiltshire Report made recommendations on a range of issues and many of these were adopted by Cabinet in its document called *Shaping the Future* (1995). The intersystemic Queensland Curriculum Council was established as a result of one of the recommendations, with the brief to advise the Minister on state and non-government school curriculum issues. The Queensland School Curriculum Office was also created to take responsibility for the development of syllabuses for preschool to Year 10. The Wiltshire report has been condemned in some quarters for its “conservative agenda”, particularly in regard to
those of its recommendations which respond without justification to a perceived community
demand for increased teacher accountability (Lingard and Rizvi, 1995). Lingard and Rizvi argue
that the degree of freedom or autonomy that Queensland teachers have enjoyed because of
school-based assessment has been seriously threatened by the recommendations of the Wiltshire
Report and the surrounding media interpretation of community reactions:

Teachers' autonomy and professionalism have been respected, as has the need to work
collaboratively within and across schools. The Wiltshire recommendations move away
from this settlement, according greater power to a central curriculum-making authority,
the Queensland Schools Curriculum Board (QSCB). In a real sense, the report can be
viewed as being distrustful of teachers and schools, seeking to establish a number of
mechanisms to ensure greater monitoring and accountability of their work. (Lingard and
Rizvi, 1995, p.63)

The implementation of the Wiltshire recommendations remains in a state of flux as of mid 1996
and did not emerge as a concern for any of the teachers at Thornton.

School-based assessment in Years 11 and 12 in Queensland is overseen by a statutory body called
the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS) (or the 'Board' as it is colloquially
known). Its role in terms of the broader Queensland educational context is outlined in Appendix
A. The high level of autonomy teachers perceive they experience at Thornton in relation to
control of subject content in the classroom is interesting in light of the influence this body
exercises over curriculum and assessment. (This influence is discussed in more detail in chapter
6.1.)

Teachers at Thornton acknowledge that the BSSSS exercises some control over what they teach
and how they assess, but they do not identify the Board as a serious threat to the autonomy they
perceive they enjoy in their classrooms. There is no imposition of prepackaged curriculum
materials at Thornton, but there are the syllabus guidelines laid down by the Board for subjects in Years 11 and 12. These guidelines vary in prescriptiveness from subject to subject. Most subject syllabuses specify the number of assessment items and the nature of those items, and some prescribe content guidelines. The BSSSS had responsibility for junior curriculum (Years 8-10) until 1995, when the responsibility passed to a newly established organisation called the Queensland Schools Curriculum Office (QSCO). At this early stage of its development it is not clear what influence this organisation will have over the development or delivery of junior curriculum in Queensland. It is clear, however, that decisions by QSCO will not be enforced upon independent schools, but that teachers in such schools would be able to choose to work from QSCO junior syllabus documents if they wished.

Teachers in each school design their own work program in each senior secondary subject, based on the generally broad syllabus guidelines provided by BSSSS. The individual nature of these programs is in part dependent upon the relative prescriptiveness of the syllabus in the subject area, but generally Queensland teachers have a degree of control over and input into the design of the curriculum in each subject taught in their school. In one department at Thornton teachers create all of their own working materials for students, having made a decision some years ago not to use any set textbooks. The control teachers at Thornton have over the curriculum materials they use with students in lessons is therefore considerable, although certainly not without limitations and restrictions.

The Queensland school-based approach to curriculum and assessment signals a quite different approach to the trends in prepackaged curriculum materials, designed by ‘experts’ in central
offices or by private curriculum specialists, which have been noted by many researchers as having a detrimental impact on teachers' autonomy (Apple, 1986, p.9; Boyer, 1983, p.143; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p.136; Dreeben, 1970, p.47; Jackson, 1968/1990, p.129; Johnson, 1990a, p.46; Metz, 1978, p.22; Perrone, 1985, p.7; Sizer, 1985, p.91). Grant (1988) traces this 'movement' back to the introduction of scientific management of schools last century, and concludes that "the autonomy of teachers has been circumscribed by new curriculum specialists and technocratic managers" (p.152). Darling-Hammond (1986) positions such controls over the curriculum as a reflection of a "bureaucratic conception of teaching" which implies that teachers implement curriculum which has been planned by administrators or specialists (p.532).

The control teachers at Thornton perceive they experience over subject content, has implications beyond a sense of autonomy as a worker. In Casey's (1993) study of a group of secular Jewish women teacher activists, she notes that these women rejected prepackaged curriculum materials, and displayed great pride in the materials they had prepared themselves. Casey notes that:

In the course of our interviews, women in this group would often proudly present me with copies of their work. Of course, the existence of material objects demonstrates workers' efforts in a measurable form, and this general sense of the need for a public justification of one's work is not absent from these stories. (p.97)

There is therefore the potential for teacher created curriculum materials to be used by teachers as a form of demonstrable accountability. They are, in this sense, a part answer to calls from governments and employers for workers to identify the quantifiable 'product' or outcomes of their work, which teacher unions and academics have challenged as inappropriate in relation to areas such as education (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p.29; Johnson, 1990, p.4; Lortie, 1975, p.133; Seddon, 1991, p.50). The women in Casey's study were proud of their work and used their work as a tangible demonstration of their performance as teachers. The enforced use of prepackaged
curriculum materials can therefore be seen as not only challenging teacher control over what and how they teach, but a restriction of one of the few ways teachers can demonstrate public accountability for their work.

(ii) Teaching approach

Teaching is an individualistic endeavour. Even in contexts where team approaches are the norm, the individual teacher flavours and colours her or his contribution in a particular way. Ben, Lucy and Michelle referred to such individualism in their responses:

I had to find my own way and I think everyone does it differently...You can't turn teachers into - it would be so wrong to try - into clones of each other. Ben T20.322

I’ve got my own teaching style, which they don’t try and change, they know that that is my style and they are not trying to change my style. Lucy T45.340

I feel that it is an individual thing, in that, someone might say I have to teach something, but I’ll teach it differently to them anyway. Michelle T39.113

The individual teacher may, however, struggle within a school context which does not support or foster her or his particular approach or style. An important facet of the autonomy teachers identified at Thornton related to their freedom to maintain and develop their own style of teaching. Michelle, Hugh and Sheila felt autonomous as teachers because they perceived they had room to adapt their teaching strategies to the particular context they encountered in each classroom:

...if I want to change some things - if I don’t find class preparation time works particularly well with students, I find they waste time and talk and are unmotivated, so I limit that and say - you do the rest at home, we’re going to do this now, things like that. Or if I want to do debating, to develop certain skills in the kids, I just go ahead and do it, I just squeeze it in as an extra to all the other things. It doesn’t seem to be a problem. Michelle T39.120

I like to have the structure there, but I also like to be able to develop it according to the students that I have at that particular time. Because I’m teaching them and I like to then
craft my lesson according to the students that I have. So I think that is where the independence is needed. Hugh T17.184

I like that kind of belief that if you’re a teacher and you’re a professional, you make a professional judgment about where your classes are at, where you want them to be, what your strengths are, what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are and what your weaknesses are. You sort of run with that. Sheila T23.248

Their perspective was endorsed by Jonathon and Melissa in their explanations of how they felt autonomous at Thornton:

In the sense that to a large extent you can modify and design your curriculum in the way you want, the strategies that you’re going to use, and as you develop as a teacher you don’t have a prescription so to speak, you have a range of learning experiences that you’d like to focus on, through that commonality of discussion that I was talking about before, but from which you can pick and choose and change. Jonathon T44.118

I like the fact that you are responsible for what you do. My area is my area, and though there are certain things I always consult admin about, it is my area. Melissa T7.71

Karlie made a direct comparison between Thornton and her experience at state schools:

I think with the other schools your hands are tied a lot more in regards to your own freedom or your own style of teaching. You have a lot more freedom at this school to teach the way that you want to. T14.236

A significant reflection of the teaching style adopted by a teacher is her or his attitude and manner of interaction with the parents of students. In discussing aspects of their autonomy at Thornton, a number of teachers mentioned the freedom they had to contact parents. Such freedom was contrasted with their experiences in government secondary schools, where ‘red tape’ made the task of contacting parents a burden to be avoided. (The notion of bureaucracy as an influence on teacher autonomy is discussed in chapter 7.4.) Control over this aspect of her teaching was important to Ann:

It is important that I feel that I can ring up a parent at any time and I don’t have to ask anyone else’s permission to do that...It is something that I do all the time. T12.639
Vivian saw easier access to the phone and parents as symptomatic of a greater sense of autonomy for her at Thornton, compared to her previous experience in a state school.

Before [in a previous school] I needed to get someone's permission to use the phone. To ring up a parent you just about needed a signed note. I don't have to ask permission to phone them up. And I probably seemed like a funny being when I first came here, because I would ask permission for everything - could I buy this book? Can I do this, can I ring up? Because I had come from this horrific system where you weren't treated like a professional, you weren't even treated like a responsible adult. They treated you like you were a little child, and you might be naughty unless they were watching you all the time. And for me it took a couple of years for that transition to take place, where I actually felt that I could initiate things. And that probably made a big difference to my feelings about being here, that I actually feel like I'm in control, not in charge of things, but I'm in control of the areas I need to be, I think, in control of doing my job well. T34.436

Field trips or excursions are recognised as a valuable adjunct to classroom teaching by most teachers, but the effort involved in organising such events is often sufficient to make it a rare occurrence rather than a regular teaching strategy. A significant part of the burden of such organisation in many schools, particularly systemic ones, is the completion of paper work connected to field trips. A number of teachers at Thornton appreciated the lack of 'red-tape' imposed upon them when taking students on field trips. Paul, one of the co-principals pointed to this himself:

*I am thinking about my subject areas...it's a lot easier to say - we want to have a field trip and it's going to take three days, and we're sorry about this, we'll take one day onto a weekend so that it is causing minimal disruption to the rest of the school.*

Jonathon also spoke of the minimal restraints in the school for organising field trips, but acknowledged that there was still an expectation that they be formulated on the basis of sound educational outcomes:

*...you can sort of decide what you want to achieve and those avenues will most likely open for you here. There's not restrictions, you know of other places. Things like in the state system, if you wanted to run various trips and you wanted to get things going, there's a lot of red tape that you have to go through, and you have to justify a lot of things and very often that in itself is an anti-motivational force in getting things done.*
guess, oh sure, we still have to justify what you're doing, but those sort of experiences are genuinely valued here and they're a little more streamlined in how you can do them, which makes them easier to plan and prepare and that sort of thing. T44.54

Fred compared his experience at Thornton directly with the state system:

One way that things are a little bit more relaxed - excursions. Where in the state system, it's paper work after paper work, if something comes up...something I didn't know was coming up, I can talk to admin and say I'd like to take a group...out for this, and it's usually not a problem, you can organise it...It's not a problem. T22.388

Fred highlighted a common problem faced by teachers in organising a semester planner for their subject area. Some external opportunities such as expositions, films or plays can be anticipated and thus preplanned, but many arise without prior notice. For teachers to be able to enrich the curricula offerings for students, the regulation and restrictions which may arise out of legal and bureaucratic needs, can loom as a real disincentive to take advantage of such events. The flexibility offered to teachers at Thornton was appreciated, as was the administrators' trust that teachers would do the 'right thing'. The latter point will be further developed in chapter 8.

(iii) Discipline of students

Discipline is a major preoccupation for teachers in their work (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, p.137; Sclan, 1993, p.13). Autonomy in discipline was identified by several teachers at Thornton as a significant area for the exercise of professional judgment as a teacher. Janice and Ann included discipline as one of the aspects of autonomy which they treasured at Thornton:

...in my class I feel like I don't have to account to anyone and I can teach as I wish and I can discipline them how I wish, you know, within reason. I don't feel I have anyone breathing down my neck to see that I'm going about things in the right way. I feel very autonomous in my class. T43.354

The whole emphasis put upon teachers being responsible and therefore, you must, like empower yourself to look after your class. And I think the fact that it's expected of you, therefore gives you the right to make certain decisions, like about how you control your classroom. That you're not told how you must discipline a kid or things. You're just told,
look you've got to make sure that this class is under control, sort it out sort of thing. And that's really emphasised, that as a class teacher you've got the responsibility for coordinating how your class is managed and that sort of thing. Which I think then empowers you to make those decisions. T32.525

While Michelle was prepared to leave the administration team with predominant responsibility for some areas of school life, she wanted to maintain input in student discipline:

The main ones I like input into are the ones that affect children - the discipline, the disciplining the children. T39.58

The importance of classroom discipline in the teacher's perceptions of his or her role is reinforced by a hypothesis put forward by Martyn Denscombe (1982) which argues that there is a 'hidden pedagogy' in teaching. This is "a set of aims and methods of teaching, which is tacitly understood by teachers, which stems from practical imperatives created by the organisation of the classroom and which is basic to competence as a teacher"(p.259). Classroom experiences, both as students and new teachers, invoke this 'hidden pedagogy', which gives priority to the teacher establishing and maintaining control in the classroom. Factors such as high staff-pupil ratios, constraints of time, and the fact that teaching remains what Denscombe calls a "highly personalised phenomenon", compound to produce "practical pressures upon teachers to concern themselves with control in the classroom" (p.256). He argues that this control must be exercised personally, without calling on one's peers for assistance, thus reinforcing the isolation experienced by teachers in their classrooms. The 'hidden pedagogy' values the teacher's ability to operate independently in relation to discipline matters to such an extent that it goes to the heart of teacher competence. Little (1992) develops a similar point in her conclusion that teachers' views of autonomy are framed by their perceived right to make professional judgments and a work ethic which dictates an "obligation to solve one's own problems" (p.173). It is not surprising, therefore, that teachers at Thornton identified the ability to discipline students as an important facet of their
autonomous operation in the school.

The Thornton handbook for students declares that the school has no written set of rules and regulations for student conduct, but rather that there is a "broad code of conduct, set out in the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities...developed and agreed on by the school community" (Welcome to Thornton College, 1994, p.4). These fifteen rights and responsibilities are set out with an understanding that they apply to both teachers and students in an attempt to reinforce "the concept of the school as community" (Staff Handbook, 1994, p.25). The emphasis is on a "proactive" approach to discipline, with the ultimate aim being to "empower students to move from an external, imposed discipline to an internal, self-discipline" (Staff Handbook, 1994, p.28).

Issues related to discipline had clearly been a concern for teachers at Thornton in the years prior to my fieldwork. Indeed, the discipline structure and process at Thornton underwent something of a crisis in the year before. It was acknowledged that the administrative team had too much responsibility for 'routine' discipline issues, and that as the school had grown this was no longer appropriate. A Student Management Team (SMT)\(^1\) was established in 1994 to address some of the problems perceived to exist in relation to student discipline in the school, and to meet the identified need for teachers to be proactive rather than reactive with respect to discipline issues, and consistent in their responses to student conduct. This team consists of a number of teachers who take responsibility for student management at each of the year levels and is chaired by the deputy principal. The model of discipline management that the school has adopted is perceived by many teachers to foster their sense of autonomy in relation to the discipline of students.
This discipline management approach has been driven by teachers rather than a few senior administrators and has been well received by Thornton’s teachers. They appreciate the recognition it gives to their professional ability to make judgments about discipline issues. They also endorse the support that the SMT is providing to their efforts in classrooms. Louisa felt that members of the SMT were giving her considerable support:

I’m left to do what I like with my form class, but I get great support from the Student Management Team, which is new. Melinda is the Year 8 person and she is just great. I’ve got great support from Maria for my form class...we’ve arranged to swap a lesson and I’m going to sit with her grade 10 class and she’s going to come down and talk to mine. 

Louisa perceived that she experienced great freedom at Thornton, and that the Student Management Team was instrumental in this, by facilitating her ability to exercise control over discipline in her own classes. She gave an example from her home class:

...I do feel at the moment that I’ve got one kid who is picking on a couple of other kids in the class. I feel like I can go and liaise with and set up a time with [a member of the student management team] to come and talk about harassment with my class, and to address issues like that. I mean, I feel as though, if I can see a problem, it is within my power to overcome that problem, or to go in the direction that I feel is necessary.

I asked Tania what aspects of her life as a teacher made her feel autonomous. She pointed to her ability to discipline students herself, but with the knowledge that she and the student also have the support of the Student Management Team. Her response also offers some confirmation of Denscombe’s notion of a “hidden pedagogy” in relation to discipline:

I think the fact that the student management is pretty much up to yourself...Well, I think the Student Management Team has been just marvellous, because all of a sudden it has gone from a student who might be having difficulties and you feel you’re not coping but you really don’t want to send them to the administration because - I always feel a sense of failure if I can’t handle something in my own classroom. But when all you have to do is to write down a screed and pop it into a student management [person], they have it on record, and they’ll take that student out of the classroom at some stage, and discuss strategies with you and the student, that will help.
These responses indicate that the ability to exercise control as an individual teacher over the discipline of students is an important facet of autonomy in the classroom for some teachers at Thornton.

(iv) Budgetary control

A degree of financial control and responsibility was acknowledged by a number of subject co-ordinators as an aspect of the autonomy which they experienced at Thornton. In light of the large number of co-ordinators in the school (as noted in chapter 3.3), this aspect of autonomy is significant at Thornton.

Keith described at some length the freedom he has to purchase items for his department. While some large items are purchased after negotiation with the co-principal, Paul Browning, Keith clearly relished his control over most purchases. His comment highlights the trust that he feels the administration must have in the staff:

...generally the autonomy is there, they trust, well I suppose they need to trust their staff, that’s perhaps in varying degrees, I don’t know, maybe they interfere in other people’s programs which I don’t know about. T10.340

Individual teachers purchase supplies and resources on a needs basis without the imposition of reporting or accountability measures involving the administration team. Vivian describes the initial pleasure she got from buying books for her department at Thornton after her experience at a state high school:

...for someone who was never allowed to say, I’d like this book in the library, it’s great. But the fact that I came from that earlier school has made me a good person to buy, I am very careful. I preview everything, I get them all and look at them very carefully, I have never been able to be blasé about it, you know - we’ll get one of those and one of those - I think I will always be appreciative of what I’ve got. T34.599
Subject budgets do not involve large sums of money, but it would appear that the 'idea' of control is as significant as the power it may bring. Julian acknowledged that the subject co-ordinator's control over the budget was in essence symbolic rather than real, but it was a significant symbol of the wider involvement that staff have in things that go on here (T13) and important for the way that he constructed his role in the school. Georgia explained the process of negotiation with Paul and the significance of having a degree of control over her departmental resources:

...what I like is the fact within my own subject area, I get given, we discuss with Paul what budget we're going to have for the year. And we have to justify it. Like if you want to do something, that's fine but you've got to justify why you're going to want to spend all that money. So it's good to know that I've got the money there and that I can spend it on what books I see as applicable or what materials I see as needed in the classroom. Whereas in the state system, you have to account for every little cent that you spend. T6.245

As the co-principal with primary responsibility for financial management of the school, Paul Browning has been instrumental in establishing the level of autonomy enjoyed by teachers in financial matters. His task has been made easier by the approach adopted by most staff to financial requests and the expectation by Paul that teachers' requests will be well justified in educational terms:

There are a few staff who I know by the time they walk in my door, it's going to be impossible for me to say no to them. And that's only because they've done so much homework that it's going to be very difficult to see a reason not to support it...the vast majority of them are in the category that they will only ask for what they think is necessary. A3.519

In her study of American teachers, Johnson (1990a) found a range of differences in the working conditions and perceptions of teachers in public schools and those in independent schools. She noted that teachers in public schools very rarely got the opportunity to decide how to spend allocated monies, in contrast to independent schools, "where teachers were granted considerable
discretion in equipping their classrooms from funds that were available” (p.69). In Queensland independent schools, budgetary control by teachers varies as each principal determines the extent to which teachers can influence the spending of funds. At Thornton, this control is considerable.

2. Life in the school

Beyond their experiences in the classroom, there was a range of factors relating to working conditions which contributed to the sense of autonomy expressed by teachers at Thornton. These freedoms are significant not only for what they say about Thornton, but are interesting as a contrast to the experiences of the teachers in private schools recorded by Connell et al (1985) in their study of teachers’ work in Australian schools. They found that teachers in private schools are often under more control from their employers and senior administrators, in areas such as dress, deportment, religious beliefs and practices, and moral and private lives.

Schools are unique in the working environments they provide for their adult workers. The hours of work, the nature of the work, both in and out of classrooms, the relationship of the teacher with their ‘client’ group, the influence of external groups such as parents and governments, are but a few of the factors which compound to create a set of working conditions which position teachers in a very particular way as workers. In addition to the manifest generic differences of the school as a workplace, there is considerable variation between schools themselves in terms of the working environment encountered by teachers.

The importance of working conditions on the morale of teachers has been acknowledged by a number of studies (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p.186; Fullan, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Little, 1982;
Sclan, 1993). One Australian study of teachers found that the level of morale of teachers was more directly affected by the context of employment conditions than any classroom difficulties that an individual teacher may encounter (Schools & Curriculum Policy Branch, 1991, p.26). Boyer (1983) argued that the improvement of working conditions for teachers is at the very heart of the effort to improve teaching. He claimed that "we cannot expect teachers to exhibit a high degree of professional competence when they are accorded such a low degree of professional treatment in their workaday world" (p.160). Sizer (1985) concluded that "improving American secondary education absolutely depends on improving the conditions of work and the respect for teachers" (p.180).

As an independent school, Thornton is free from some of the constraints faced by a school which is part of a large centralised bureaucratic system of education (as will be discussed in chapter 7.4). The school's administrators and staff are unshackled by some of the conventions and regulations which may dictate the working environment constructed in state schools. As an independent school employer, Thornton is, however, subject to the requirements of the Teachers Award - Non-Governmental Schools and the same industrial laws relating to working conditions, which govern employment conditions in state schools.

Teachers at Thornton enjoy working conditions which allow them to take considerably more control over their lives than may be the case at many other schools - state or independent. The prominent examples that arose during my fieldwork were in regard to the generous application of leave provisions, the availability of a staff crèche, freedom of movement in and out of the school premises, the ready acceptance of part-time teachers and the perceived sense of being able to 'be
yourself as a teacher at the school.

(i) Choice of school

Perhaps the most fundamental reflection of the autonomy of a teacher at Thornton or any independent, non systemic school is that he or she has chosen to be there, and has been chosen by the school to work there. A teacher chooses to apply for a position at Thornton and she or he makes a conscious decision to accept a job offer to teach at the school. Lesley, a member of the support staff, acknowledges the importance of this in her assessment of the sorts of people who teach at Thornton:

...they are very dedicated, they work in a private school, and the teachers are here because they want to be. They had to apply for the job, they wanted to come to this school, and I think that makes the difference, it's not like an Education Department school where they've just been sent there. They have applied, because they want to come to this school. Lesley S8.344

Teachers who work in the Department of Education in Queensland do not enjoy this level of control over their working life. The transfer system operating in the Department means that any teacher may be required to transfer elsewhere in the state, and a transfer must be accepted by the teacher unless he/she can “establish that reasonable grounds exist for not accepting the transfer” (Queensland Department of Education Teacher Transfer Policy, 1994, p.2). The grounds for transfer include meeting the staffing needs of schools throughout the state, and providing a teacher with a range of teaching experiences (p.2). By teaching at Thornton, teachers are free from these possibilities. As Melissa observed, it's not like a state school where you get sent - they send people (T7.1042). The placement and transfer of teachers attracted considerable media attention in Queensland at the end of 1995 (see Butler, 1995 and Turner, 1995), when the Queensland Teachers’ Union accused the government of “causing great emotional and financial
harm to families by ordering teachers to move to remote or rural areas even if they had established their life in an area” (Butler, 1995, p.5).

For many teachers who have moved to Thornton from the state system, there are strong memories of the impact of the transfer system on their lives. Ted likened the lack of control over his own destiny in the state system to being pushed around like a pawn on a board (T42). The control he felt over his life at Thornton was in sharp contrast with his previous experience as a senior teacher in state high schools, despite some disquiet he felt about recent developments at Thornton:

...it is still a place where I feel I have got some control of my input...I know damn well I don’t have a bureaucracy that’s going to transfer me to Rockhampton if they’re short of a teacher. T42.134

Clearly, the sense of personal choice that may be perceived in the acceptance of a position at Thornton or any independent school, contributes to the sense of control that teachers feel in their working lives.

The obverse side of the teacher’s choice to teach at Thornton, or any independent school, is that the school has also chosen the teacher. Appointment to Thornton is highly selective and competitive, and despite the protection of an industrial award and a union, there is an implicit bargain enacted in the acceptance of the position to teach, and often a legally explicit one, to agree to adhere to the philosophy and mission of the school. In agreeing to accept the mission of the school, the individual teacher may risk compromising his or her own teaching philosophy, or be encouraged to move on to another school. Hatton (1985) acknowledges the potency of staff selection for private schools:
Initial selection procedures allow for choice of staff, market pressure acts as a backstop when the choice has been ‘inappropriate’, and a relatively stable staff situation is able to be maintained as the needs of other schools and movements of other teachers do not need to be taken into account. (Hatton, 1985, p.260)

David Loader, principal of an independent girls’ school in Melbourne, recognises the existence of such a dynamic in non-government schools in his observation that “in independent schools...the principal does have a lot of power, including that of employment or unemployment” (1982, p.239). Dreeben (1970) argues that the power of the labour contract extends beyond employment or unemployment to influence the daily working life of the employee. He coins the phrase “affiliation by hiring” (p.56) and argues that “with this type of control, exerted not through coercion or surveillance but by prior contractual agreement between two parties, the burden of proof rests upon the worker who would expand his area of discretion” (p.19). The administrator clearly has the power in such a relationship to define the parameters of operation for a teacher in the working environment. Clearly, the freedom to choose to teach at a particular independent school is not an uncomplicated reflection of autonomy.

(ii) Dress

As noted earlier, one of the things I noted in my field notes after the first interview with the co-principals at Thornton, was the relative informality of the dress adopted by the senior administrators and teaching staff:

Both men are casually dressed, there is a certain air of informality about the school already. Other independent schools I’ve worked at in Brisbane have not had this level of informality about them. (Field notes:16.2.95)

My own experience of dress standards in a number of independent schools in Brisbane has been that dress standards may not have been formal in the sense of ties and coats for men, or stockings and court shoes for women, but that there are clear expectations (sometimes written in dress
codes in Staff Manuals) that staff will be dressed formally in a manner approximating that expected in business circles. Brisbane is a subtropical city where temperatures regularly rise above thirty degrees Celsius during the summer months, and very few schools are airconditioned. The demand for formal business dress which may be appropriate in air-conditioned offices, seems rather absurd in such circumstances.

Phillip, a new member of staff in 1995, recalled his experience at the interview for his job at Thornton:

_I wore a suit and felt incredibly overdressed, and I was distinctly uncomfortable the entire time. Neither of the principals... was wearing a tie, no-one was wearing a jacket, they were wearing short sleeved open neck shirts, and it just really surprised me._ T9.86

He went on to describe the effect of dress on his attitude to his work at the school:

_Despite the fact that we're not supposed to use the word casual, I feel that the school is very casual in its approach. I guess I'm thinking in terms of coming from [school name deleted]. I mean I wore a tie and long pants every day for the last two years and haven't worn one since. So little things like that do think impact on the way you feel about your work, and I feel more relaxed here._ T9.67

Robert was a teacher on exchange from the United Kingdom, and he described his reaction to the casual clothing worn by most staff at Thornton:

...if there's a teacher here with shorts and a flowered shirt on, they're not a bad teacher. ...Back home if I turned up in a flowered shirt, it would be that I was letting the side down - I wasn't professional etc. etc...I don't think I should be expected to wear a jacket because if I was flying around the Art room with a jacket on, people would think it was most odd. I think it wouldn't stop me being a good teacher, I would still, I mean my professional standing would rest on my relationship with the children and not on the way I looked. And I like the informality here because informality here doesn't mean they're casual, it just means they're informal, and I think back home we don't understand the difference between casual and informal. T5.487

The ability to dress casually was a real issue for Sheila and Fred in terms of reconciling their personal preferences with their working lives:
I would have great difficulty - and I guess that's why - I mean, I have a great deal of
trouble telling the kids how to wear their uniforms. Sheila T23.297

The dress thing has been an underlying issue that's been there. We're allowed to dress
basically more casual than we could in a state school, but still dress professionally, you
know, tidy, respectable, which I don't think there is anyone who comes to school dirty or
that sort of thing. Fred T22.375

The notion of 'dressing professionally' underpins the apparent freedom enjoyed by teachers at
Thornton in relation to dress. There are, however, unspoken but commonly understood limits to
this freedom, which may cause some problems if contravened. The administration may face a
common problem for 'laissez-faire' regimes - that having a minimum of rules is fine when
everyone agrees to abide within certain boundaries, but when some people go beyond the
perceived parameters of appropriate dress, problems may arise.

One of those apparent boundaries appears to be related to the habit of many male teachers in
Queensland of wearing long socks with shorts. Three teachers reported that some male teachers
had been gently reprimanded by one of the co-principals for not having their long socks pulled up.
It appeared that some male teachers were absolved from this requirement, but others were not:

There seem to be different sorts of guidelines for different people. Some people have
been asked or told to pull their long socks up, for example. I haven't.

One issue that has come up, is the male staff to have their socks up all the time, which for
myself, I feel very uncomfortable...with my socks up. I mean, it's just not me, it's out of
character with me. Like today, I feel a bit hot, but I don't think I really look untidy with
them down.

I've never been told, I've never seen a dress code, maybe there is one, there probably is
in our teachers' manual and I just haven't studied it. Yes, we're just basically allowed to
dress, I think, as we please. I've heard of a couple of teachers who have been asked to
pull their socks up.

The subtle reinforcement by the administrators of a particular code of dressing for males reflects a
particularly gendered notion of appropriate behaviour and form. There is an expectation on the part of at least one of the senior administrators, that male teachers will dress in a particular way. This expectation also suggests that there are minimum standards for dress in the school, although they are not made explicit.

The solution to dress standards adopted by most schools is to dictate or negotiate a code of appropriate dress, but I sense that the Thornton administration has deliberately avoided this approach. Richard Simpson alluded to this issue in part of his report on his study leave. After visiting three Los Angeles schools, he noted that “we observed an interesting phenomenon among the Los Angeles schools, and it was repeated throughout our tour: the higher a school’s socioeconomic status, the more informally staff dressed” (Report on Study Leave, 1993, p.49). He went on to discuss the teachers’ dress standards at each of the schools and then concluded with a message for Thornton teachers - “For our part, let’s be sure our own presentation and grooming is in keeping with what we demand from our students” (p.49).

There emerges, therefore, a somewhat contradictory picture of the degree of freedom that teachers have in relation to dress. Whereas most teachers dress quite informally, and the administrators endorse such informality through their own casual dress standards, there are conventions limiting absolute freedom in dress. These conventions may not, however, be made explicit until tested by deviance.

(iii) Freedom of movement in and out of school

Recalling the furtive way I left the school grounds on very rare trips ‘out’ during the lunch break
while teaching at two other Brisbane independent schools, I was interested in the contrast in teacher movements I observed at Thornton. In neither of the schools I taught in, was there an express rule forbidding staff from leaving the school grounds during the school day, but there was a covert message which made me feel that it was inappropriate. As Goodlad (1984) observes, “even under the best of circumstances...lunchtime at school falls far short of providing the freedom, relaxed ambience, and refreshment of lunchtime for most workers outside of schools” (p.170). I would defy anyone to think of another occupation in which a worker could be reduced to subterfuge to get the bills paid or to meet a friend during his or her lunch hour.

My experience was clearly not an isolated one, as several teachers at Thornton expressed similar feelings about schools in which they had taught previously. Thornton was, however, different.

_I've spent thirteen years feeling my head will go to my shoulder if I ever ducked out to get something from the shops, at a state school. Although it was never, ever expressed even there. But there was always just this feeling._ Fred T22.670

_Yes, I like the campus, I like the fact that I can leave when I want to leave._ Harry T19.608

_You don't have to justify why you are popping out. I mean, I start Mondays at 10.45, so if I'm here at 10.40 that's fine. That's what I like about it, because that allows you to do a few other things with my time. I mean this is a good year because I have blocks of time when I can do things...Not report to anybody. Like at [school name deleted]...what, you want to go out in your spare - what for? Samantha T28.404

...last year, I didn't have a home class and I had Tuesday morning one and two off. So if I didn't get in here until 9.00 I didn't feel very bad about it. If I had an appointment, I could make it Tuesday morning, to go somewhere to the doctor or whatever...I often explain to my friends who are still teaching in the state system, that I think teachers are prepared to do more at this school because they're generally treated better._ Max T16.152

The flexibility that working at Thornton offered teachers was acknowledged by many staff. Fred recalled his experience at the initial job interview with a subject co-ordinator:
I remember when I was at my interview...I said...what hours am I expected to work. What time do you expect me to arrive, what time do you expect me to leave. And he said, no time, he said, we're professional people with a job to be done - you do the job. T22.420

Fred went on to say that such flexibility was very important to him because it allowed him to fulfil commitments in his family life:

...I might have to drop my son at cricket practice before school, it means I can come in a few minutes later, my son and I get that personal time together which is important, because I work to support my family, my family is my number one priority. So the flexibility is great. As long as I get the job done, there are no hassles, you know. T22.428

Fred’s perception that the school’s structures and philosophy supported teachers in their lives as family members as well as workers, was shared by other men and women teachers, as I will discuss in chapter 4.2(v).

Clearly, the freedom of movement in and out of the school was sufficiently important to a number of teachers that they thought it worthy of comment. It could easily be dismissed as a trivial issue, but in a work culture such as a school, where the monitoring of the student population is an integral function of the institution, it is all too easy for that to translate into the monitoring of staff as well. Teaching staff at Thornton feel that they are autonomous workers in this regard, and this freedom was interpreted by many of them as a reflection of the administration’s trust and respect for their professional conduct, a point which will be developed in chapter 8.

(iv) Leave provisions

The provision of leave for teachers has the potential to have a major impact on an independent school, where there are not the larger economies of scale in place to mediate staff changes. A large system of education like the Department of Education in Queensland can move personnel from school to school with a minimum of disturbance to the daily routine within any one school, if
the need arises to relieve staff who have taken leave. An independent school such as Thornton has a limited capacity to adapt the allocation of duties and personnel. As a result, one could foreshadow that independent schools would keep a tight rein over the management of leave, yet my own experience in two independent schools was otherwise, and the experience of teachers at Thornton also indicates a contrary situation. Leave provisions are generous for teachers at Thornton, often providing staff with opportunities which are beyond the spirit and provisions of the governing industrial award.

The *Teachers Award - Non-Governmental Schools (1983)* makes provision for leave for sickness, long service leave, leave without pay, maternity leave, adoption leave and trade union training authority leave. Teachers are entitled to eight days of cumulative sick leave for each completed year of employment with an employer, or one day's sick leave for each six weeks of employment. A medical certificate is required for absences of more than two days. Long service leave is governed by the relevant provisions of the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act*. Entitlement to pro rata leave is earned on the basis of 10 years of employment with the same (or same system) employer. Although leave provisions at independent schools in Queensland are governed by the award, a large part of the interpretation of the award is left to the discretion of the principal, and thus considerable variation occurs in the application of the leave provisions across different schools in the non-government sector. Teachers at Thornton report that the co-principals are fair and generous in their treatment of individual cases.

As in some other independent schools in Brisbane, the monitoring and regulation of sick leave for staff at Thornton appeared to be applied on a fairly liberal basis. One of the support staff raised
the manner in which the school monitored sick leave entitlements as an example of the freedom enjoyed by the teaching staff.

...I would say they've got a lot of freedom there. They've got a lot of freedom in the school as far as taking days off. Gwen, SI.34

She went on to say, somewhat disparagingly, that there was no apparent monitoring of sick leave by the administration, and that it was left to the individual.

Teachers appreciated that they could approach a member of the administration team and discuss a personal issue that may require them to take some time off. Chris would never have considered approaching principals at previous schools about taking time off, but she felt quite comfortable in making such an approach at Thornton:

If I came in and said - I am really off my trolley, and I need to have a day off to get myself together - there would be no qualms about them saying - go for it - take two days off if you need it. T15.94

In many schools a teacher would take the day off as sick leave, but without discussing the reason with the principal.

Leave without pay from an independent school is dependent on the discretion of the principal. In many independent schools such leave is granted for only specific reasons and there is a degree of inconsistency in its application. The experience of teachers at Thornton is that leave without pay is readily available. Tess cited her ability to take leave as one of the major personal rewards she experienced at Thornton:

Being able to request leave and get it granted. Because I personally needed it at that time and therefore it wasn't questioned. T1.869

Fred appreciated the potential for control over his life outside of school and in school:
...the school has a philosophy where they'll let people come and go, you know, I want to go to England for a year - they are fairly open, whereas a lot of places you have to resign. There is a bit of coming and going, and because we're a young staff, we have a lot of ladies pregnant, leaving us, continuing their families or whatever. So there is a bit of toing and froing. T22.121

Maternity leave has been a recurring factor to be included in the complex process of juggling personnel and timetables at Thornton. A number of the current staff had taken maternity leave in the past, and four or five women announced their pregnancies during my time at the school. To my knowledge, all of these women intended requesting maternity leave for some length of time in the coming year. Tania explained what impact flexible leave arrangements had on staff, in particular, the encouragement of families and children:

...the staff feel that there is a great deal of flexibility available to us, if we need it. I think the mere fact that teachers feel that they can have babies and they can get the time off and there's a crèche when they come back...and those who are working full time feel that if there is a major issue that comes up in their lives that they can't work full time in the next year, that the flexibility is there for them still to have a job, but to go part time. Just in the time I've been here I've watched teachers move in and out of full time for health reasons or whatever, family reasons. Yeah, I think it gives flexibility. T27.333

Clearly, the administration's approach to leave for teachers has produced a perception amongst teachers of a favourable ethic of flexibility and fairness in regard to work at the school. Such an approach is one part of the web of factors which contribute to teachers feeling autonomous as workers in the school.

(v) Availability of a staff crèche

One of the features of Thornton which has earned the school considerable kudos amongst teachers in Queensland, is that it has a crèche available for the children of staff, which is a rare innovation in Queensland schools. A report of the opening of the crèche in a local newspaper reported that it was "believed to be the first of its kind established by a private organisation in
Australia” (The Village Pump, 1994, p.36).

The crèche was a staff initiative which began early in the school’s history, as a number of female teachers with small children sought someone to ‘babysit’ for them during school hours. After placing an advertisement in the school newsletter, they employed a woman to look after their children for three days a week. This arrangement eventually became the victim of its own success, because as the number of children in the crèche grew, the need for improved and larger facilities became apparent.

In 1993, $35,000 worth of improvements were necessary in order to meet the government standards that are a precondition to gaining registration as a child care centre and thus become eligible to receive government subsidies. This very sizable commitment by the School Council and administration was clearly appreciated by those staff who use the facility, as indicated by Adele Mathews’s observation about:

...the gratitude of those teachers to the school. There were teachers in tears, expressing their gratitude. A1.696

The crèche has provided more than tangible, pragmatic benefits to staff at the school. It would appear to have assumed a major symbolic significance in many of the users’ minds, as it represents a commitment by the School Council to the teaching staff, and an acknowledgement that teachers do have family commitments that have a bearing on the way they perform their job at school. Fran was quite emotional in describing what the crèche had meant to her:

The thing about it, is that I guess it has enabled me to feel part of the community, because I guess it has just showed me how much of an emphasis Thornton places on the family. And the fact that we have important ceremonies here and the crèche kids are taken to them. You know, they may cry through them, but nobody has ever said don’t bring them. T38.214
She felt that the school’s improvement of the crèche was a *vote of confidence* in the staff (T38.164).

School support for teachers as parents was evident in a number of things I observed in my time at the school. Children from the crèche attended the Easter service, with the babies sitting on their parents’ laps during the proceedings. I was surprised to see children on teachers’ laps in a number of the school magazine staff photographs over the years. At teachers’ meetings and co-ordinators’ meetings, children sat with their parents or played quietly in the background. Senior students have been employed by the school to care for children for short periods during teachers’ meetings when teachers have been unable to make alternative arrangements. Sharon pointed out that:

> ... you don’t get that sort of support elsewhere. People would either have to leave the meeting or somehow arrange some other form of child care. So it does make the doing of your job easier. T30.297

The crèche is currently authorised to cater for up to fifteen children, with only four children allowed to be under two years of age. This limitation was going to pose a problem for the group in the coming months as a number of staff were pregnant and their babies were all due at similar times. As a result of the government regulation on numbers, one teacher would miss out on a place for her child. As Fran observed, this situation would not have arisen before they had been accredited:

> The disadvantage of being registered through Family Services is that they now govern us, whereas before - in the past, we’ve just taken another baby and got someone else to come in and help...If we knew that taking another child may stretch the care or pose a safety risk to the other children...we’ve got other people in to help. Now we can’t do that. T38.181

Those staff who use the crèche, run the crèche. Fran explained the co-operative nature of their
management:

...all of the staff who use it are involved in the management. X does the finances, we share that, she does that this year, so she’s in charge of getting the money from everyone, handing that in to Shirley, having a cheque for them on payday....and the women who work there tell us if there is a problem, we call a meeting and discuss it.

T38.200

The crèche has enabled several teachers to return to work when they wanted to - without the crèche on the school premises they felt that they would have had to stay at home much longer because alternative child-care options did not suit them. Adele Mathews believed that it meant the school was benefiting from the early return of such teachers:

It means a lot of - particularly women - can come back earlier than they otherwise would and there's a lot of wonderful expertise out there. People would just love to be able to do that. A1.672

Mary felt that she would not have been back at school so soon without the crèche:

She's only six months old and I'm still feeding her, so I can go at morning tea and lunch time to tend to her...It just makes my life, the structure of my day a whole lot simpler than if I was doing something else - if I was having to drop her somewhere else, I'd have to wean her virtually. T8.462

Fran went so far as saying that the crèche represented a recognition of women's right to work:

...it has made me feel that you're appreciated and that your right to work and be a mother is recognised. T38.152

The proximity of the crèche and thus their children, has assuaged the concern that several mothers expressed about leaving their children in childcare to return to work. Mary and Sharon explained that:

You know, I'm only two hours away from her at a go...there has been no wrench when I started back at school. Mary T8.474

I know that she's about a hundred metres away from me during the day, so if anything were to go wrong I could be with her within a couple of minutes...she started here at 9 weeks of age - it would have broken my heart at that stage to have to leave her at a childcare centre and go to work, whereas I have never had that feeling. She is simply in
one part of the school and I'm in another part. Sharon T30.154

All of the teachers with children at the crèche try to drop in on their children during the day, thus maintaining a daily connection which would not be possible were they in an offsite childcare centre. Sharon describes the approach she has adopted:

*It means that I can in fact go and see her during the day, so that I can keep up with what she is doing... There are some times when life is just too busy and I don’t see her from 8 until 4, but as much as possible I will actually try at least once, try to get down there during the day - when she’s painting, or in the sandpit, or having lunch or having stories read to her, so she knows that I am close at hand, and has that sense. It also means that I can spend more time with the actual people who care for her, and get to know them better and therefore I understand more when [she] is telling me stories.* Sharon T30.182

Fran shared Sharon’s appreciation for the familiarity of surroundings that the crèche provided and the bonus of ‘knowing’ the people who were caring for her children:

*I don’t think I could have put my kids into a day care centre, when I stuck them there in the mornings and I didn’t know the people.* T38.134

The crèche has been particularly beneficial to the large number of women who are part-time teachers at Thornton. Adele Mathews describes the benefits as she sees them:

*It was established early on for the children of the teachers. And we have a huge number of part-time teachers. So it is really wonderful for them to be able to come, put their children in for the time they’re in, and pick them up and go home.* A1.667

Fran is a part-time teacher who has had two children in the crèche, and she explained what it has meant to her:

*So the important thing for me is that it has enabled me to continue working, I mean, part-time. I don’t want to go full time.* T38.130

The crèche is also used by staff who do not have their children enrolled there on a permanent basis. Fred explained that his wife looked after their children at home, but he had used the crèche on about a dozen occasions over the years when they needed childcare for a short period
Although the crèche can be seen primarily as a service to staff, there are also direct benefits to the school in its existence. I was interested to explore whether having one's children so close by was a distraction for teachers in fulfilling their daily duties. My own observations and the comments of teachers led to the conclusion that quite the opposite effect has resulted - in that the presence of the crèche has increased the potential for teacher commitment and participation, particularly in the case of part-time teachers. Being freed from the need to leave the school at a particular time to collect children and knowing that children are close by and well cared for, allows teachers to give more to their job than they may otherwise be able to do:

“It has certainly freed up time for me, in that I didn’t have to race off to grandmothers or whatever.” Fran T38.150

“In no way does her being here impinge on any of my actual classes during class time.” Sharon T30.228

The availability of childcare has also released teachers to attend meetings after and before school. I saw few of the frantic and stressful departures which are the daily routine for many teachers who have after-school commitments to collect children from daycare centres by a certain time. The crèche was celebrated and appreciated by all, whether they used it personally or not.

The story of Thornton’s crèche tells of teachers taking control of their own working conditions, having sought and received the support of the senior administrators and School Council. The existence of the crèche within the school grounds allows teachers, in particular women teachers, to have greater control of both their working lives and family lives. The acceptance by administrators and staff, of teachers’ children as part of the school community, supports the
notion that teachers are not merely workers in isolation, but do have ‘outside’ lives which have an impact on their work and are impacted upon by their work.

(vi) Part-time teachers

There is an underlying resistance to the employment of part-time teaching staff in many schools, stemming in part from conceptions about the nature of schools and teachers. I have spoken with a number of school administrators who have expressed concerns about the difficulty of ensuring that part-time teachers participate in their share of extracurricular activities and playground duty, or the difficulty faced when administrators have to insist that part-timers attend staff meetings and other school functions which take place outside of their set teaching times. In addition, many administrators consider that the complexity of a timetable structure which incorporates part-timers outweighs any advantage that may accrue from having them on staff. These considerations are sufficient in most schools for administrators to reject the employment of part-time teachers, except in emergency situations.

Such anecdotal evidence is borne out by a Department of Employment, Education and Training study (Lewis, 1990) of part-time work in Australia, which included interviews with a small number of principals. The secondary school principal interviewed argued that he could envisage no benefits for schools in the employment of part-time teachers (p.65). He concluded that “part-time teachers in general lacked any commitment to the school outside fixed teaching hours”, although he conceded that this could be an individual thing (p.65).

Thornton, however, stands as an example of a school which has, since its beginnings, defied such
prejudices about the commitment and participation of part-time staff, and actively employed a large proportion of part-time staff, the majority of whom have been women. That women represent the majority of part-time teachers at Thornton is not surprising on two counts. Firstly, since women dominate the part-time work force in most areas of the Australian economy, such numbers at Thornton could be anticipated (Lewis, 1990, p.9). Secondly, teaching remains a female-dominated occupation in Australia, as discussed in chapter 3.3. In the year of my fieldwork, there were 17 part-time staff at Thornton, sixteen of whom were female, which represented 38% of the total teaching staff.

The high proportion of part-timers at Thornton evolved in part out of the school’s recent establishment. In the early years it was not feasible for the school to offer a full range of subjects, particularly specialist subjects, without relying on part-time staff. As the school has grown, however, the administration has retained a commitment to the employment of part-time teachers.

The school has adopted a pro rata approach to paying part-timers, as explained by Paul Browning:

...For us, 27 periods is a full-time teaching load, 27 out of the 35. And so therefore, we calculate part-timers' teaching loads as a percentage of 27. So to make the maths, if someone is teaching 21 periods...it's 21/27 as a percentage. And that includes benefits. If it's 80%, they receive 80% of a full-time teacher's package. So they are paid 80% of the award rate, 12 months of the year... it's 80% superannuation, 80% sick pay, 80% everything. A3.159

This method of paying part-time teachers is in contrast to the approach taken by most schools.

The more common approach which is endorsed in the Non-Governmental Schools Teaching Award (1987), is to pay part-time teachers on an hourly rate for work performed, which includes a 19% casual loading to compensate for the lack of benefits such as sick pay, holiday pay etc.
Paul saw this method as less equitable than the pro-rata payment:

*Our part-timers are almost entirely permanent part-timers, and I think that (the pro-rata approach) gives a fairly clear recognition of their whole position in the school. They are working at 80% of a full-timer's rate and so they get 80% of that package...It's my impression that they feel pretty happy about it.* A3.178

There are clearly benefits accruing to part-time staff from the pro-rata payment, and these are acknowledged by the teachers.

The school's policy on the employment of part-time teachers has included the possibility of full-time staff changing to part-time status. One teacher claimed that:

*This is one of the easiest schools to change your status. I mean, you can go from being part-time to full-time, full-time to part-time, at the drop of the hat.*

The flexibility this gave to teachers was discussed briefly in the section on leave provisions, but it was particularly significant to those teachers employed to teach part-time. It was identified by a number of part-time staff as an example of the control they felt as workers. One teacher explained that it increased the feeling of democracy experienced by teachers:

*I think that knowing your hours can be flexible is a way that you can feel that you actually have some input. Feeling that you can say - look I'd really like to do this, this and this.*

Several other staff members acknowledged the control that this flexibility gave to teachers in the school:

...we've had some teachers who are full-time and decided that was too much for them and they wanted to go part-time, so they were able to do it. We've had others who have been part-time, so they found that they've needed the money or for one reason or another...so could they please go full-time, and they're obliged. We have teachers who take a year off to go overseas and they're able to do that, almost any request is granted and that has to be a big payoff.

*I value the school where it's got the flexibility to allow you to modify your load according to what your needs are.*
The large proportion of part-time teachers at the school has not meant that they have been removed from the focus of negative 'press'. The following comment by Rosemary Simpson shows that sentiments similar to those I raised in the introduction to this section, have surfaced in staffroom chat at Thornton over the years:

_The public perception is that part-timers don't pull their weight amongst the staff. That's been said, and it's been said back to some of the part-timers. Some of them aren't very vocal, but I know that some of them go about doing extra things that other people don't know about._ T18.295

A full-time teacher made the observation that part-timers in the past had _manipulated the timetable:_

_They pushed to get their day off this day, and it meant that other people had timetables, I mean full-time teachers had timetables that were not necessarily educationally sound._

A part-time teacher noted that:

_Sometimes you get full-time teachers resenting the fact that part-timers don't do this, or don't do that. Or I know some full-timers who would point to particular part-timers and say that they do not do enough._

Initially the following teacher shared such reservations about the number of part-time teachers on staff, but her perspective changed because of the commitment she saw from the Thornton part-time teachers:

_In the past I have been a bit critical of employing too many part-time teachers because I've thought from a management perspective that you can't get as much out of them, that they don't tend to be as committed. But I don't think that holds true here._

There were, therefore, a number of reservations expressed about the impact of the large population of part-time teachers on the culture of the school, and in particular, upon full-time teachers. In the time I was in the school, however, it was my observation that part-timers were generally appreciated by administrators and their peers, and that they felt appreciated and valued. A number of teachers observed that not every part-timer teacher in the school had an equally strong commitment to the school, just as every full-time teacher in the school did not, but the
composite presence of part-time teachers was positive.

The opportunities offered at Thornton for teachers to work part-time give them considerable control over their working lives, but it is a control which is laced with complications. The correlation between part-time work and autonomy is not clear cut, as is apparent from Negrey's (1993) study of gender and part-time work. She concludes that "sometimes reduced work facilitates a greater sense of balance and personal autonomy, other times it creates obstacles to achieving such a sense of well being" (p.5). The obstacles include reduced incomes, irregular hours, and loss of social status in societies which value only full-time work (Negrey, 1993, p.12).

But the balance of such disadvantages against the benefits of more flexible working hours and more apparent control over working life, appear to work to the advantage of part-time teachers at Thornton. The nature of teaching as work means that one of the benefits of part-time work, the opportunity to alter work schedules for personal needs, is a major advantage to teachers, as the working hours are more closely attuned to child-care and school holidays. In addition, the part-time teachers at Thornton can negotiate their timetables with Paul Browning to an extent not enjoyed by teachers in many other schools.

(vii) Professional development opportunities

Professional development has a rather bad name amongst teachers. The cynical and negative reactions to staff development or inservice activities by many teachers I have taught with are not unusual, as the literature points to similar responses from teachers in other countries (Johnson, 1990a, p.45; Little, 1982, p.333; Purkey & Smith, 1982). In addition, the reality that the nature of the school as a workplace mitigates against teachers taking or making opportunities for
collaborative endeavours or professional development with colleagues, has been raised by a number of researchers (Goodlad, 1984, p.187; Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Little, 1982; Perrone, 1985, p.8). The generous provision of professional development opportunities in both formal and informal contexts at Thornton, provides teachers with some control over their working lives, in particular, control over their career development.

Teachers at Thornton are encouraged and supported to take advantage of professional development opportunities. Until May 1994, there was a legal requirement in Australia for an employer with an annual national payroll exceeding approximately $226,000 (1993-94) to spend at least 1.5 per cent of their total payroll on 'structured training activities' for employees, under the auspices of the Training Guarantee Scheme (CCH, 1996). This scheme was put 'on hold' by the Labor Government in 1994 after four years of operation. Thornton's commitment would appear to go well beyond such mandatory imposts. Staff expressed a sense that money is not begrudgingly spent on professional development and that requests for individual professional development are rarely refused. The importance of professional development in the school was reflected in the establishment of a standing committee for professional development in 1991. The co-principals wrote in their report that year, that such a committee would ensure a "a long-term coordinated approach to this important area" (Co-principals' Report, Reflections 5, 1991, p.5).

The emphasis of the school's approach to professional development is on individual teacher needs and demands, a strategy which has strong support in the literature (Burello & Orbaugh, 1982; Byrne, 1983; Conners, 1991; Orlich, 1983; Scriven, 1991). As Collins (1991) argues, teachers "learn best when they can diagnose their own learning needs, plan much of their own learning,
Thornton's teachers nominate specific activities to suit their own needs, or if a particular area of common interest emerges on staff, it may be offered as a professional development opportunity for the larger group. At present teachers apply to the administration team for financial or time support for formalised professional development activities, and refusal is rare. Paul Browning foreshadowed, however, that financial constraints and a larger staff may result in tighter procedures for such requests:

*Well, I think in many areas of school funding we are going to need to move more and more to a recognition of less flexibility of the upper limit of a budget request. And we are going to need to set up ways for people to be more aware of this, and to put into practice some ways of looking at priorities there.*

The teacher-centred approach marks a shift in the traditional locus of control of professional development for teachers. Sykes (1996) argues that "teachers are frequently the targets of reform, but they exert relatively little control over professional development" (p.465). Thornton's professional development strategy is one element of a broader philosophical framework to build a learning community for both adults and students.

The teacher appraisal process (to be discussed in chapter 5.1(i)) is emerging as the centre-piece of Thornton's evolving professional development strategy. Decisions have been made after considerable consultation with staff, for teacher appraisal to proceed within a professional development framework rather than the evaluative, judgmental model that has characterised much teacher appraisal in the past.

The administrators recognise the school's responsibility for providing support for professional development for staff, and the ultimate benefits of such an investment to the school community.
Richard Simpson explained that there is a focus at the school on creating a conducive climate for teachers' professional development:

*We try to grant people what ever professional development they ask for...The Professional Development Committee has asked teachers where they'd like professional development. We've been through a number of possibilities, we've tried a whole staff session on something that people have said would be good, with mixed success. What we've found the most successful is people - kind of dictating - generating their own professional development, and again that sort of leadership comes through.* A2.115

Paul Browning spoke of professional development in terms of the school motto - *In balance we grow:*

*I think growth implies you are not now where you are going to be in 12 months time or 12 years time. Growth implies development, and it applies obviously to students who come in at Year 8 and progress through to Year 12, but it applies equally in our minds to the adults in the community as well...We recognise that we need to continually work on our own personal as well as professional development.* A3.10

The nourishment and importance of professional development at the school are well recognised by teachers:

*Every proposal that I've written up, I've been granted, which is really encouraging. So, I've been allowed to go on conferences, seminars...Everything we've wanted to do, we've been able to do.* Georgia T6.262

*I mean, money here just flows like a waterfall as far as professional development goes.* Max T16.656

Monte was inspired by his peers' interest in professional development:

*I've been challenged by my teaching colleagues because they are all very much into professional development. They are very in touch with what is going on within education, as a teaching profession. They're very informed about trends, research, about findings, so I'm finding that I'm learning a lot from those people. That's stimulating me to go and find out more as well.* T26.37

Samantha contrasted the culture of professional development at Thornton with that she experienced in her previous school:

*...it was just anti-intellectual, which I hated with a passion. There was no discussion - professional development was a joke where you had someone bumbling up the front and the back row were just talking about the cricket and laughing.* T28.77
William regularly attended national and state conferences in his principal subject area, and he felt that being allowed to do so, fostered his sense of professionalism and being valued at the school (T31.323).

The underlying bargain of employer support of professional development is that there will be a return to the organisation for money spent by the employer on professional development, in terms of increased skills, expertise or efficiencies. It is difficult to quantify such an improvement in skills or effectiveness, but Thornton appears to be getting a ‘good return’ on their investment in terms of the goodwill generated by the generous professional development provision. Ross felt that he worked much harder at Thornton than he did at his previous independent school and he felt that this was in part because the school gave him opportunities to learn and develop professionally:

*I think a lot of people are. Most people do. A lot of things are done extra... Because, it is because of that admin attitude. Plus you are learning a lot more skills when you get a chance to get involved, your skills improve in a lot of different areas.* Ross T32.320

William contended that the administrators recognised the value the school got out of supporting teachers to attend conferences and activities run by professional associations (T31.337).

The commitment to professional development for staff has included generous provision for study leave for the administrators. Richard Simpson took study leave in 1993 to visit a number of schools and institutions in North America; Paul Browning took study leave in 1994 to visit Canadian and British schools and Adele Mathews travelled to the United States at the end of 1995. All three included attendance at courses offered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The concept of ‘overseas sabbatical leave’ is almost unheard of for principals of state secondary schools in Queensland, although not so rare for principals of non-government schools.
Such exercises are very expensive commitments for an independent school. I found myself wondering about the implications of the administration being given such opportunities in a school which espouses a flat organisational structure, and an avoidance of an ‘us and them’ mentality. I am not implying that the administrators at Thornton could be likened to Collins’ (1991) scenario of “bureaucrats encouraged...to interpret professional development as leadership development” (p.17) and thus devote money only to their own development. Equally, I am not suggesting that such professional development for the administration team does not benefit the whole school - as I am sure it does. But I wonder whether the equity implications of overseas professional development for the senior administrators have been openly discussed with staff? I heard no criticism by teachers of the administration team having these opportunities, yet I was struck by the inconsistency between rhetoric and practice, and the potential source of tension in the light of Paul Browning’s foreshadowing of considerable fiscal restraint in the school.

The generally positive picture of Thornton’s professional development approach was coloured by the observations of two teachers in positions of added responsibility in the school, who felt that teachers were not sufficiently involved in the broader educational community or in professional development opportunities beyond the school gates. William felt that teachers were fairly insular at Thornton and took minimal interest in professional associations in education or in their subject areas (see Little (1993, p.8) for a discussion of the place of teachers’ professional associations in professional development). He argued that such involvement opened up important professional development opportunities for teachers:

People are doing bits and pieces, and one off sort of things, and that is good, and that may be a growth in our professionalism, because once upon a time people did nothing. But we need to get more involved in that way. T31.341
Carley was critical of what she described as the *complacency* of teachers at Thornton and she supported William’s observation about their lack of involvement in professional associations:

...*what really worries me is the lack of commitment to professional development and professional associations...I think teachers need to undertake more consistent and continuous professional development in whatever area they choose. To ensure that they are up-to-date and current with innovations in their curriculum areas.* T403.358 & 424

She expanded on this by voicing a concern about what she perceived as the small number of teachers at Thornton engaged in postgraduate studies:

*There are not a lot of staff who are presently studying or who have studied recently, past their initial teaching qualification. So there’s a certain amount of complacency and that worries me.* T40.355

William agreed, observing that *I think we’re even a bit light on with people with degrees* (T31.461). I too was surprised by the small number of teachers with qualifications beyond their initial degree and/or teaching qualification, as I discussed in chapter 3.3. That situation is changing, however, with a number of staff currently engaged in postgraduate studies.

The encouragement and support for professional development at Thornton facilitates a considerable level of autonomy for teachers. The individual approach taken to the provision of professional development means that teachers retain control over their own career development and can pursue courses of development that suit their personal and professional needs and interests.

(viii) Freedom to be yourself

The philosopher of education Paul Nash (1966) wrote that “to be autonomous is to be truly oneself” (p.148). This was hardly an original thought, as countless writers have subscribed to a similar sentiment in poetry and prose. But even in its trite familiarity this statement reminds
teachers of the pressures of conformity and regulation that can pervade their working lives, in particular, the need in some cases to prevent the private persona from emerging in the public context. Nel Noddings (1992) reminds us of the absurdity of this separation of personal experience from education, when she states that "who we are, to whom we are related, how we are situated all matter in what we learn, what we value, and how we approach intellectual and moral life" (p.xiii). Yet in so many schools, teachers do not feel free to 'be themselves'.

One of the facets of autonomy which emerged from some interviews was the opportunity the school gave to teachers to 'be themselves'. Tess felt that she had the freedom to be herself at Thornton, to such an extent that it was warts and all sometimes (T1.780). Robert believed that this was the first school in which he had been allowed to be himself, rather than being forced by the school context to play a role as a teacher (T5.229).

The administration team clearly values individuality and seeks to foster an environment in which teachers can 'be themselves'. These are qualities which have been acknowledged by Fullan (1992) as foundations to the building of "norms of collegiality" (p.19). Hargreaves (1994) observes that in his ideal of "collaborative cultures", "teachers reveal much of their private selves, teachers become friends as well as colleagues, and if bad days or personal problems are encountered, teachers make allowances and offer practical help to their troubled colleagues" (p.150). Whilst on study leave, Richard and Rosemary Simpson interviewed a number of American and Canadian students during their visits to schools. Richard summarised these students' perceptions of a good teacher in his report, and the first point he makes is - "Be a person, as well as a teacher. Open up a bit of yourself to us, but don't try to be too familiar: there's always a gap between teachers and
students" (Report on Study Leave, 1993, p. 54).

One demonstrable example of the culture of acceptance in the school is a more liberal and accepting approach adopted at Thornton to the employment and treatment of teachers who are gay or lesbian, or in some other way are in contravention of the moral codes adhered to by some more conservative schools in Australia. Administrators in many non-government schools have been known to ask prospective applicants about their private lives or to dismiss teachers when their homosexuality or ‘questionable’ marital status come to the administrators’ attention. Khayatt (1992) notes in her study of lesbian teachers in Canada, that “teachers more than those in any other profession, are held most accountable for their professional and private conduct” (p. 82). In another Canadian study, Hargreaves (1990) notes that “the fear of personal disclosure and its implications for professional performance can become especially acute” for teachers employed in Catholic school districts (p. 151). In a study of private schools in Australia, Hogan (1984) writes that “it is an accepted procedure in the hiring of teachers for independent schools that applicants may be questioned about their private lives and their personal values” (p. 125).

Such rigid moral criteria have not been enforced in the selection processes at Thornton. One teacher spoke of the culture of acceptance in the school and commended it as one of the strengths of the school:

There are a few Thornton staff who are gay, and it’s not an issue with anyone at all. We’re invited to the same functions that they’re invited to, partners or otherwise - and you have the usual gay jokes directed at us and it doesn’t seem to be - no, it is not that it doesn’t seem to be - it just isn’t an issue. And that comes right from Paul down to the cleaners. Which is pretty unusual.

Whilst teaching at a Catholic school, another member of staff had become pregnant, but was not
married. She was forced to leave the Catholic school because of this situation. She applied for a position at Thornton and tells her story:

*I wasn't aware at the time that Adele knew, and apparently Adele had known all along...But when I came to fill in my forms, when I was actually taking a position here at the beginning of the next year, I spoke to Adele then and she said straight out that she couldn't believe that it was ever an issue at the other school, and it wasn't an issue here.*

There are, therefore, a number of teachers at Thornton who can 'be themselves' when that freedom would be unlikely to be extended to them at many other schools.

3. Voice in decision-making processes

Although autonomy in their classrooms was the primary area in which teachers at Thornton sought autonomous standing, most of them also valued their capacity to 'have a voice' on wider school issues. The desire to have a voice in the decision-making processes in the school was a recurring motif throughout interviews with the administrators and teachers. Opportunities for teachers to shape their practice and contribute meaningfully to the decisions which structure their work emerged as fundamental reflections of autonomous practice (see Darling-Hammond, 1986, p.543).

The founders of the school had a clear philosophical commitment to giving teachers a voice in the running of the school. They framed this commitment around the development of a school culture which was collegial and an organisational structure which was consultative. The *Staff Handbook* states that:

*Thornton functions wherever possible with a collegial climate. There is as little hierarchy as possible, with important decisions and activities undertaken after consultation and discussion, though ultimate responsibility for decisions lies with the school’s Administration Team (the Co-Principals and Deputy Principal). People give generously of their time, often serving on ad hoc or standing committees. Hence the active involvement*
of all staff is sought in the decision-making process. (*Staff Handbook*, p. 18)

This statement of commitment is clear, but the rider which places the ultimate decision-making power with the administration team, can easily be lost or forgotten in the momentum of consultative processes. The administration team at Thornton has faced the consequences of staff disquiet, when they have taken that “ultimate responsibility” after consultation with teachers and their decision has not been popular. These incidents, although isolated, have left a legacy of cynicism among some teachers, and considerable tension on staff, which will be explored in detail in chapter 5.1(I).

The school has a clear philosophical commitment to collegiality and consultation and this is reflected in the framework of conduits which has been established to facilitate teachers’ voice. This section will examine the major conduits in this deliberately constructed framework, namely teacher meetings, collegial groups, committees, the School Council and a Professional Journal. Either through their very existence, in the case of teacher representation on the School Council, or because of the way they are run, in the case of teacher meetings, these devices give teachers the opportunity to express opinions or be involved in decision-making processes within the school. The current administration has also made it their practice to consult directly with individual teachers when problems or issues arise. Such individual consultation is a further way in which teachers can have a voice in the operation of the school.

(i) Individual consultation

There are a number of formalised structures established at Thornton for teachers to voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making processes, but in addition, a pattern of individual
consultation emerged from my observations and the interviews. The administrators consult with individual staff members, both formally and informally, on a range of issues in the school, particularly those which have an immediate impact on that teacher. Paul felt that the informal interactions between teachers and administrators were instrumental in giving him a voice in the school:

*I think the main difference between Thornton and the other school I was teaching at, is that there is a lot more informal transactions between teachers and between admin and teachers, that counts a lot. There is a lot more happening outside the formal structures of staff meetings.* T35.209

One example of such individual consultation was in relation to the development of the school’s building program. Paul Browning’s share of the co-principal responsibilities has focused on the administrative side of school life, including the management and development of the built environment. He has had to make numerous decisions about buildings, interior design, and the provision of a range of specific facilities. A committee has worked with him to develop an overall plan for the school’s capital works, but in relation to many buildings and facilities, he has consulted directly with the people who were going to be most intimately involved in working in those areas. He gave an example of the process he went through in respect to the two largest buildings on the campus:

*It was a matter of speaking to the teachers. To some degree we had some requirements, we needed x number of classrooms, we needed an arts facility, we needed a manual arts facility. It was really a matter of sitting down with those teachers and getting responses from them, of what they saw as their needs... So we’d say to the Art teacher - go to two or three schools where you know there’s some good things going on...and find out what they’ve got there... Really it’s a matter of collaborating with the teachers and talking with them about what they see as their needs.* A3.466

Support staff were also included in the consultation process where appropriate, and they appreciated being involved. Megan, for example, was invited to nominate the colours and carpet
for the area in which she worked (S3.278).

Bob and Rosemary felt that the consultation process over design and outfitting provided a rare opportunity for teachers, because in most schools the planning process took place at a site remote from the school and its particular context:

*When [name deleted] came here, that building there was a full catering kitchen because of the boys who lived here - a brilliant kitchen. But it didn't meet the requirements for Home Economics, so that was gutted and [name deleted] had the opportunity to devise what she saw as a perfect Home Ec area. Same with Art, Manual Arts and History...The school architect...came in to confer with students and staff about where we'd put buildings and why, and he came in as part of Global Studies in the second year to actually use students and the staff as clients- "OK, I'll tell you what some of the outlines are, and you tell me what you think we need. Bob T11.387

You know, when we built the Science Department, the Home Ec Department, the Art Department, the teachers were part of the planning and design. And that doesn't happen in a whole lot of occupations. Rosemary T18.95

The administrators are open and flexible so that a number of areas of school life which in many schools are not negotiable, are negotiable at Thornton. One such area is teacher's work loads, and in particular their timetables. Hazel lives some way from the school. She was offered a position on the Student Management Team and managed to negotiate with the administration team for that time to replace her involvement in a home class.

*So I asked if that could be a trade-off for Student Management Team, as opposed to being a classroom teacher. That's still worth two lessons a week, but it means if I get held up in traffic, it's not quite as urgent for me to be here by 8.30. T36.336

She went on to explain why she could negotiate that element of her work load:

*That's the way things work here. If someone has a reasonable proposal that is worthwhile considering, then it's always considered and looked at for its merits. T36.349

Teachers' timetables are an important determinant of their working conditions. 'Good' timetables are treasured and problematic ones are the source of complaint and disquiet. Paul Browning is
responsible for the school timetable, and teachers perceive that he is flexible and creative in his creation and manipulation of the timetable. He is also seen as approachable. Tania spoke of how important the ability to negotiate hours were to her. She felt that this enabled her to have some input into her own workload, feeling that you can say - look, I'd really like to do this, this and this (T27.354).

A number of instances of individual consultation and negotiation emerged in relation to timetables and workloads. One involved a new member of staff, who was studying at university, and found that a compulsory tutorial had been scheduled during the day, at a time when he was teaching a class. Richard Simpson explains their approach to this issue:

...it has caused us a bit of a problem with the timetable, but we've found a way to change some things around, it's very messy, but we felt it was very important to support him with that. A2.157

The teacher was rather astounded that the administration was prepared to make timetable changes for him. He felt sure that similar measures would not have been taken at his previous school.

Part-time teachers are arguably the most difficult teachers to accommodate fairly in the school timetable, as was discussed in the earlier section on part-timers. Attempting to give part-time teachers timetables which make the maximum use of their time at school, normally means allocating them blocks of teaching rather than a lesson at the beginning of the day and one at the end. This is a real challenge to the timetabler, especially where there are as many part-time staff as there are at Thornton. The administrators have consciously factored these needs into their timetable philosophy because they recognise that generosity and flexibility work both ways, as Richard explains when he discussed their approach to timetabling:
(It's) about good will. I don't mean that in a cynical way, but there are times we ask a lot of people, so I think you have to be seen to be giving, you have to give where you can, especially if you have a lot of part-time teachers who are young parents. They have important needs there. That's usually what it's about, it is usually about part-timers, trying to get a way to pick up their child from childcare, and the timetable won't work, sometimes they can find a way of making it work, sometimes it won't work, but at least we have a go. A2.168

I was told a number of stories about how Paul had gone out of his way to attempt to accommodate a part-time teacher. One teacher told of her need to breastfeed her child who was in the school creche:

Paul actually changed the timetable so that I would have sufficient time to feed [my daughter] and so that involved changing every teacher's timetable, but that was the priority it was given. T30.158

Fran was anxious to have a timetable which allowed her particular times with her child, but the timetable could not be adjusted. Despite her disappointment, she told the story of her timetable difficulties with an appreciation that Paul had tried to make changes:

...it just wasn't possible. For him to change some of those days around so that I might have had 1, 2, 3 and then go, would have meant other part-timers would have had to come in for 6 only. So it just wasn't possible...I think he's done the right thing by me this year. Fran T38.272

Another part-time teacher had a reduction in her timetable which was going to cause her some financial difficulty, and after negotiating the workload with Paul, she was given some additional teaching to try to compensate (Joyce T4.461). Incorporating such variables must make the task of managing the timetable much more onerous, but Paul Browning argued that it was important to maintain such flexibility and consultation with teachers because it was part of the Thornton way of doing things (A3.229). He saw it as his responsibility to:

...make the rest of the operation run as smoothly as possible, and because it is essentially an operation that involves human beings, most of that smoothness involves people. A3.235
Such a statement reinforces the administration team’s commitment to acknowledging teachers, as well as students, as important people in a school.

Paul’s flexible approach to the timetable and personnel management is reflected in my observation that he is not territorial about the timetable. He does not possessively shield the timetable from public view or maintain a shroud of mystique about its management, as I have seen occur in other schools. As Phillip commented:

That sort of freedom, that they’re even prepared to have you suggest a change. [At my] last school, the timetable was sacred, nobody but nobody could suggest how it could be done better. T9.509

Paul welcomes assistance with problem-solving, and was happy to admit that certain teachers had skills in timetabling which were of great assistance to him:

I was talking about [name deleted] before, and the timetable problem...so I said to her look, I can’t find a better solution to this, and I spent a fair bit of time on it last night, but with your experience - if you can find it - do. So she went away and she found a better solution and that was great. A3.252

Teachers are encouraged to find better solutions to timetable problems as testified to by the following comments:

...the requests that I put in about the timetable are pretty much granted, or if they haven’t been and I can work out a way of solving it, then that solution is taken on board...if I can work out an improvement for me in my timetable that doesn’t...affect anyone else’s timetable or something like that, or the spread of subjects or whatever, well, yes, that’s accepted and that’s wonderful. Harry T19.570

Paul’s response was - here’s the master timetable, you take it home, come back with a solution tomorrow and I’ll look at it. Phillip T9.507

Individual consultation and negotiation of timetables thus emerge as significant reflections of a broader commitment by the administration to giving teachers a voice in their own working lives and the more encompassing work culture of the school.
A less formal manifestation of individual consultation and interaction was seen in the staffroom talk that I observed over the months of fieldwork. Teachers at Thornton talk about their teaching over lunch, and pursue animated conversations about teaching issues over a cup of coffee. A teacher sat down with a small group at morning tea one day and asked - *What would you do if ... happened in your classroom?* (Fieldnotes, 27.3.95). A variety of responses was given, with each member of the group engaged in the problem-solving activity. This was not an isolated instance, as the teacher talk I observed often involved planning, hypothesising and sharing of teaching strategies and issues. Little (1987) argues that teachers in collegial cultures, “talk to one another about teaching often, at a level of detail that makes their exchange both theoretically rich and practically meaningful” (p.503). Clearly, these were not the only things of which teachers at Thornton spoke, as I documented discussions about movies, weekend activities, house purchases, restaurants, cooking and travel, to name but a few. But ‘teaching talk’ was a significant part of the conversations I shared in, as I moved from table to table in the staffroom. Such conversation was not dismissed as ‘mere shoptalk’ but valued and enjoyed. It reflected a level of consultation with peers which generates a stronger sense of individual and shared control over work and working conditions.

(ii) Teachers’ meetings

Teachers’ meetings at Thornton are a major conduit through which teachers can express opinions and directly influence the decision-making process in the school. The manner in which these meetings are run fosters an open and consultative approach to formal policy formulation, which is carried through into less formal opportunities for discussion and decision-making.
Teachers' meetings are held in one of the two large rooms that make up the library. At the two meetings I attended, attempts were made to have teachers seated in a circle, although the confines of the library space meant some people were seated in rows. Meetings are held three or four times a term on a Monday afternoon after school, beginning at 3.30 pm and normally finishing at 5.30 pm, although they have been known to finish closer to 6.00 pm. Responsibility for chairing the meeting is rotated around the three members of the senior administration. Considering other attempts in the school at sharing leadership responsibilities, I was surprised that the chairing of the teachers' meeting was not at times given over to a member of the teaching staff. This point was commented on by one teacher:

...there are a number of schools which have - starting on a really base level - staff meetings that are chaired on a rotational basis by teachers. I think that is a really good model, I mean there can be lots of problems with that, but I think it's a good start. Carley T40.286

Each teachers' meeting is structured around three themes - professional development, information and discussion. At my first meeting with the co-principals, they made a point of saying that they attempted to include a discussion of educational issues on the agenda, and not merely mundane operational things (Field notes, 16.2.95). The agenda for the upcoming teachers' meeting is normally circulated in advance of the meeting so that staff have the opportunity to add items. In my experience this is a rare occurrence in schools, and the representativeness of my experience was supported by comments by several members of staff who applauded the use of the agenda:

Here, an agenda for a staff meeting or a co-ordinators meeting is circulated well before the meeting and people are asked to contribute to it, and then when the final agenda comes around to all staff members, there your topic will be. So, I haven't experienced any censorship of things that have concerned me. Julian T13.84

It's very organised. It is very nice to have an agenda for a change...I always knew that that's the way teachers' meetings should be conducted, but...I came from a tradition where that wasn't the way...And that is just a breath of fresh air, just seeing that these meetings were organised effectively and properly. Monte T26.365
The teachers' meeting is perceived by the administrators to be an integral structural foundation for the operation of the school. Paul Browning identified teachers' meetings as one of the main ways that staff are acculturated into the Thornton way, particularly as a medium for administrators to model certain practices of leadership and behaviour which they hoped would permeate through the school culture. In each of the meetings I observed, the administration team sat together at one end of the room, each taking notes during the ensuing discussions, flagging in a very physical way that they were listening, recording and absorbing staff discussion.

Many teachers commented on the length of the teachers' meeting, but they normally added the caveat that such lengthy meetings were a 'necessary evil' if teachers were to be given an opportunity to have a voice in the operation and development of the school:

*I mean the things that I like are the fact that we do have staff meetings. OK, they do run to 5.30, but they're only once every three weeks, you know, so we've got a voice, so I wouldn't want to change that. Oh, yes, I might resent it like everyone else, when I'm sitting here at 4.30 bored out of my brain, but there will be another time when I won't be bored out of my brain, I'll be really keen to put a particular point of view, and we can't ask for democracy and not be prepared to present at that sort of thing. Harry T19.647*

*From the moment I started in this school, I suppose I realised it was different because at staff meetings everybody was given a chance to say something. Even if it took an extra two hours to go around the group. "I think that everybody should have input on this topic", Richard would say, so we'd go around. But that just points out to everybody that what everybody has got to say is valuable. Mary T8.116*

*They drag on a bit, but I think it is good that we are asked to discuss it. We are not told about it. But that goes back to being given the responsibility, that if we want to change something and we don't agree with something, we're given the opportunity to talk about it. Lucy T45.261*

I observed an extraordinary level of participation from teachers during the teachers' meetings. At the first meeting I attended just over 50% of the 40 teachers present spoke at some stage during the proceedings (Field notes, 20.2.95). In the March teachers' meeting, 21 people made a
contribution, out of the 38 teachers present (55% participation rate) (Field notes, 13.3.95). I looked for a gender pattern in contributions from teachers and found that women spoke more often than men, in approximate proportion to their representation on staff. Teachers were clearly willing to speak at the teachers' meetings in a way that I have not experienced in other schools, where the more normal pattern of discourse has been for one or two people to dominate the proceedings:

_I have no reservation or hesitation about voicing an opinion._ Monte T26.425

_Most people are more than happy to express an opinion. I mean, occasionally there are conflicts, but if you don't have different ideas, obviously you never have conflicts, so I think that's essential anyway._ Michelle T39.222

Teachers not only exhibited a preparedness to speak through their level of participation in the meetings I observed, but those who did not speak expressed a confidence to do so if they so wished.

...generally if I want to say something, you can say it...Yes, they're very open. Ann T3.182

_I think it's really good that people do speak out...I realize that I need to be more assertive and that's something that I'll work on....the reason that I don't speak isn't that I don't think they'd listen to me. I'm sure they would, but that's just something that I choose not to do._ Nina T21.222

_Yes, in general, I'm the sort of person who doesn't like to hear her voice all the time, but if something needs to be said and hasn't been said, I'll say it._ Sharon T30.323

The high level of participation at teachers' meetings was explained by teachers in a variety of ways. Max felt that it was because _there's not so much of a power base that some schools have_ (T16.322). To a large extent, teachers participate because they feel that they are being listened to - not only by the administration team, but by their colleagues:

_Yes, if I have something to say. I don't very often do it, but if I have something to say on a particular topic, I wouldn't have a problem speaking out about it, and I feel as though_
I'd be listened to. Milly T33.222

The appreciation of being heard extended to discussion involving those issues which could be expected to produce division and disagreement amongst the staff. The experience of dissension and ardent discussion during previous teachers' meetings had not silenced teachers:

I feel reasonably comfortable yes. Even though, before hand I could tell you the people I will disagree with...That's never stopped me from speaking out. Vivian T34.241

I do talk quite freely...I think well, I've got just as much right to say what I want to say as you've got to say that, so I'm not going to shut up just because you don't agree with what I say. Carley T25.383

Importantly, teachers see that there is a point to expressing an opinion or suggesting a particular approach, because the staff meeting is perceived to be a decision-making body, where their discussion actually leads to outcomes:

...people were given the opportunity to talk, and people would disagree...but why I say people were listened to, is that two or three days after the staff meeting we would have summary sheets of what was discussed and then further action taken. Monte T26.375

Things are discussed which are carried forward. Paul T35.207

The importance of the teachers' meeting as a decision-making body was brought out by the exchange teacher who had only just started teaching at Thornton. He compared his first teachers' meeting at Thornton with his experience in his school in England:

There are times back home when I think that we're discussing things for no apparent reason. We're not going to make a decision and at the end of the day we don't really come up with any recommendations. We seem to have just aired a subject and we've got no where. And I've seen people come out of meetings being extremely irritable and saying - what the hell did we spend that time there for, what on earth was the purpose of the meeting.

His first teachers' meeting at Thornton was rather a different experience:

That meeting, I think was well structured, we got through a lot of things, we got through it on time, people made several good points and notes were taken by the people taking the meeting...nobody lost their temper. There wasn't any 'us and them' situation. T5.388
The role of the administrators, who chair teachers' meetings, in determining the ambience of the meetings, is of course paramount. The way in which they chair the meetings orchestrates and encourages contributions from staff. I noted constant invitations for teachers to have their say, as reflected in phrases I wrote down during a meeting which Richard Simpson chaired: *Is there a feeling that...? Could we have any input from anyone? Are you happy that?* (Field notes, 20.2.95). It may be that the administrators' concern to maintain the sort of climate I observed in teachers' meetings, prevents them from allowing a more democratic rotation of the position of the chair, as I suggested earlier would seem appropriate.

This interpretation of the teachers' meeting paints an almost unbelievably rosy picture. Teachers do tell of times when the collegial atmosphere has degenerated into a situation which has reflected lack of a consensus and some degree of animosity. These times would, however, appear to be the exception rather than rule, but because of their rarity they stand out in the collective memory as particularly poignant and significant moments. Amy spoke of these rare occasions:

... in the history of the school most things go fairly smoothly and we agree fairly well at the staff meetings, but there have been a few times when we haven't agreed at staff meetings. Amy T12.308

Such incidents affected the staff deeply because the general atmosphere was normally one of trust and collegiality. One particular incident with respect to student grooming stood out in this regard and will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.1(i). Although the incident had occurred the year before, there was a remaining legacy of considerable sensitivity and anguish, which a number of staff vented during interviews. This incident provoked such a level of intensity of feeling amongst staff because a significant number of them felt that the decision-making power of the teachers' meeting had been hijacked. There was a real fear that this executive decision marked a turning
point in the school's history, as the senior administration team had determinedly gone ahead with a decision which was fiercely opposed by a significant group of staff.

I observed a similar dynamic during one of the teachers' meetings I attended. The agenda item was about staff and student parking arrangements. My field notes from this meeting on the 13th March noted:

There was a lengthy discussion about whether students should be able to park in the school grounds. This issue attracted more discussion than any other on the agenda. Some people clearly felt that students should not be able to park in the school grounds. Paul Browning clearly wanted them to be able to park in the school, so that the school had more control over what they were doing. He eventually pushed through the decision, though I feel if it had gone to a vote it would not have been supported. He put the proposal in such a way that the issue was really pushed through as he wanted it to happen. No-one disagreed, but there was clearly not support for this perspective. (Field notes, 13.3.95)

I later interviewed one of the members of staff who had voiced a clear opinion against Paul Browning's position and she spoke about her feelings about this incident:

Well, I'm not happy about it, but to a certain extent you have to be pragmatic and say well - if they are going to be admin they do have to have some more say in what the bottom line is. Paul did come and see me privately afterwards and say was I happy. And I said, no I wasn't. So at least, they are sort of aware of the fact that sometimes they stand on our toes a bit. So I said I wasn't happy. And he's - they're quite open to you saying that. If you're not happy with that decision. T12.320

Many staff express the view that the administration must have the right to make some decisions (as will be discussed in chapter 5.1(i)), but there is a strongly held conviction that there must be an openness about such decisions, so that teachers know when a particular subject is not open for debate and that the administration decision will go ahead regardless of staff opinions. The failure of the administration team to openly disclose the ground rules on some policy decisions has resulted in a considerable undercurrent of dissatisfaction. In general, however, the Thornton
teachers' meetings are accepted as a major venue for teachers to influence the decision-making processes in the school.

(iii) Collegial groups

Teachers' meetings feed into smaller groups of teachers called collegial groups, where issues can be discussed at greater length and in a more intimate atmosphere than can be achieved with a staff of over fifty. Collegial groups were mentioned briefly in the previous chapter as one example of the Thornton way of doing things. They represent an innovative attempt at constructing a collegial culture amongst teachers, but their effectiveness has been questioned by many of Thornton's teachers, and for them to survive as a viable conduit for teacher voice in the school some modifications appear to be necessary.

Collegial groups function as clusters of about 8-10 teachers who meet on a regular basis in school hours during the year, normally as a follow-up to a teachers' meeting, but also in response to specific issues. The administration allocates teachers to the groups, attempting to group teachers from a range of subjects areas who have a 'spare' at the same time. Paul Browning explains the rationale for this policy of diversity:

_We try as much as possible to get people of different subject disciplines together, so that you don't have all of the Maths Department in one collegial group. You have a Maths person, a Science person, an English person, a Humanities person, a Language person and so on. So they can broaden each other's viewpoint on educational issues, so that they can share different perspectives and problems._ A3.440

The aims of the collegial groups are listed in the _Staff Handbook:_

(i) To facilitate cross-curriculum knowledge and understanding of what is happening in other subject areas;
(ii) To facilitate on-going professional development through observation and feedback of each other's work in the classroom. Collegial groups will be an important part of our
teacher appraisal process;
(iii) To be a source of mutual support: sharing successes, frustrations and problems and canvassing possible approaches to these;
(iv) To act as discussion groups which then report to full teachers' meetings on policy or problem-solving issues. At the first meeting groups will normally want to map out the year's activities for the group - e.g. organise into pairs (or threesomes) for observation and feedback and perhaps agree on what will take place at the next meeting, or a theme to be pursued over several meetings... The activities of collegial groups are an important part of professional development at Thornton. Please be an active and involved member of your group, as without this the groups will not succeed. (Staff Handbook, 1994, p.19)

A rotating chairperson convenes each collegial group meeting and either a specific issue is addressed which has been referred from a teachers' meeting, or in the collegial group I attended, topics for discussion are taken from the group. Where decisions or recommendations are required from the collegial group, it would appear that a consensus model is adopted. Barbara explains:

*Things aren't voted on or anything like that. People talk around issues until they come to a kind of commonly held position...Then the chairperson...will go back to the staff meeting and put forward their perspective, their group's decision, whatever it was.*

T2.203

I observed a collegial group meeting of seven people in early May, which took place in the 5th period of the teaching day. There was an agenda set out by the chairperson, which focused on teacher appraisal proposals. Those people who had already prepared and submitted their proposals were happy to share information gleaned about the process. Everyone in the group participated energetically, although it is difficult to measure the impact my presence had on the group dynamics. The discussion moved from teacher appraisal to supervision of student teachers, to the importance of appraisal being seen as professional development, to some fairly complex philosophical issues about the motivation for teacher appraisal. The chair closed the meeting with an invitation to members to give her agenda items for the next meeting, and a plea that they all make time to go to each other's classes. People seemed to enjoy the opportunity for forty-five
minutes of peer discussion in the midst of their hectic day (Field notes, 2.5.95).

Despite my brief positive experience of a collegial group, it became clear that administrators and teachers were united in their assessment that the collegial groups were not functioning effectively. The administrators were aware that the collegial groups were not operating as the ideal of collaboration and teacher voice that they promised to be. Paul Browning spoke at a teacher meeting about some changes that were to be introduced in relation to the collegial groups. He hoped that these would address some of the problems that had arisen in past years. Paul believed that the problem with the groups was quite easy to identify:

The problem is essentially a time and organisational problem. I think there's a lot of goodwill and recognition that there's a great value in the collegial group structure and meeting procedure and process. But we're all very busy, and I think the main problem, which I alluded to in the meetings...[is] that it takes an awful lot of time to get people all up to the same area or level of commitment...So I think a lot of people recognise the value of the collegial group. A3.412

The major change which he was suggesting was for each collegial group to elect a chair who would remain in that position for some time, perhaps a term or a semester. Paul explains how the previous approach of rotating chairs had contributed to a perceived problem with collegial groups:

One of the problems we had was that...we had suggested...that a different member chairs it each time they meet. Of course, the meeting would come to an end, “oh gosh, we've got to run off to class now”, and they don't get the chairperson for the next meeting. So nobody takes that on. And it's something that everybody thinks - “well, I suppose I should take some responsibility and say to two or three mates, maybe we should get this collegial group up and running and meet again, but gosh, I've got all these things to do in the next few weeks, so I think I'll just shut up about it.” A3.425

Richard Simpson was similarly convinced that the collegial group had real merit as a concept. He wrote about the collegial groups in the report on his study leave, taken during 1993. He wrote that:
Our Thornton concept of collegial groups was seen as enlightened and highly desirable: we can almost certainly use these groups more effectively than we do now, but even so we saw no counterpart in American or Canadian schools, and it's a real "feather in our cap". Let's nurture and develop it! (Report on Study Leave, 1993, p.33)

Despite their reservations, the co-principals were firmly hanging on to the collegial groups as a concept worthy of continuing inclusion in the Thornton way of doing things, but teachers were not so convinced that they were viable in the current context of schooling.

Many teachers supported the concept of the collegial groups, but they normally attached some sort of caveat to their conviction:

[They function] with various degrees of success depending on who's in your group, but I think they're a great idea. Vivian T34.246

I know why they are there, that we are sharing as professionals, discussing matters that are then brought to a staff meeting. But I hate them. Rosemary T18.309

I think it's a fantastic idea. They could work really well, but because we're all so busy, we don't get a chance to really do all the things that we should with them. Hazel T36.358

The idea of it is really good - but it's not working. Louisa T41.411

There were a number of positive outcomes from the operation of the collegial group concept. As a forum of fewer than ten people, they give people who do not like speaking in large groups an opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes in the school. Marie and Sharon are good examples:

I'm not a big group person. I'm a small group person. If I want to say something it's usually after a lot of consideration. I can't just stand up and say - this is what I think...I like to discuss things in small meetings and maybe then to take them to big meetings. I don't know that it's necessarily that I'm frightened but I do have a problem speaking in large gatherings. Marie T37.218

I guess I'm somewhat louder in small groups, but in general I'm fairly quiet in meetings. Sharon T30.327

Nina and Paul also felt that they were unlikely to speak out at a teachers' meeting, but they were
much more comfortable speaking at their collegial groups (T21.240 and T35.267). Barbara was happy speaking out at a teachers’ meeting but she felt that the collegial group facilitated dialogue amongst a staff which had grown considerably in recent years:

*The staff meeting is very big, so that everybody simply can’t get a chance to express their opinion. Whereas in a smaller group they can on a particular issue.* T2.158

As a forum for professional discussion the collegial groups enable people to learn about their colleagues’ experiences with particular classes and individual students. The daily reality of school life is that teachers have few opportunities for meaningful contact with their peers on professional matters (Little, 1982, p.333). Hugh and Vivian both appreciated the opportunity to talk with colleagues:

*I find the collegial groups an interesting focus. Because you get to learn how other people are coping with classes that you have, and sharing ideas about students they are having problems with, or you aren’t or you are...it comes down to the bare bones of teaching - you know, “I’ve got this problem, how did you solve it?” “Well, here are some ideas - I did this.” And then you run away with it.* Hugh T17.97

*A lot of people say what I say and that is that you can come to school for a week and I can go home and feel like I never really had a conversation with another adult through the week, unless I had to approach them about work. Quite often a few of us will get together and say - “Isn’t it awful, I haven’t really spoken to a real person all through the week” - because we are so busy all the time. In that sense, I like going to collegial meetings because if I’ve had a week or a fortnight or a month where I hardly feel like I’ve spoken to an adult... it’s just a good chance for you to be able to share things that have been going on. I mean, they’re not whingeing sessions, but just sharing and talking with other people, and hearing what they think about something. And sometimes finding out that there is another person who thinks the same as you about something.* Vivian T34.247

Georgia saw value in the collegial groups, despite some of their drawbacks:

*...everyone always begrudges the time, because it’s always taken out of our non-teaching time and our so-called preparation and correction time. But it’s always worthwhile. It’s always good to sit down with people from the different subject areas and talk about issues that have been raised in the school, and to see how we stand, you know, how we feel about it. It’s a good way for us to get input into what’s going on in the school.* T6.329
The aim espoused in the Staff Handbook for collegial groups to promote peer observation and feedback has some advocates amongst the staff. Amy told of her experience in the previous year, when she formed a pair with two other members of her collegial group and they visited each other’s classrooms:

I now feel that this really is one of the best ways I can improve my teaching because each time I got one point that I could really use to improve my teaching. They may only be little tiny things, but over time it’s all those little tiny things that add up to a better performance. It’s just little things like [name deleted] said to me when she came - “when you went around and looked at their work, you didn’t really encourage them to put up their hands and say who’s lost. You went around and tried to work out who was lost.”... That’s just a little thing, but I’ve used that a lot since then...And it really does change the atmosphere in the class.

In addition to the suggestions given by her peers for improving her classroom practice, Amy appreciated the affirming comments they shared with her:

I had very positive feedback as well from those people who came into my classroom, which really made me feel a lot better about the way I teach. When you’re a new teacher...you’re very isolated, because you’re the only person in the room, you really don’t know how you’re going compared to everyone else, you really don’t. It takes a long time to feel confident. So that’s been very good to have people come into your room and say - “Oh, you’re doing a great job - That lesson went very well - I enjoyed that lesson.”

Despite Amy’s positive experience, the reality seemed to be that few people had been involved in peer observation in recent years. Rebecca’s comment is indicative of the lack of commitment to peer observation:

...very rarely do we go into other people’s classrooms...We’re just too lazy to organise it or too busy. I remember last year, a group of us decided - ok, we’ll do it this week. You come and see me, and I’ll come and see you - but it just never worked out. Rebecca

Sharon spoke of arrangements she had made with peers to observe each other’s classrooms which had consequently fallen through (T30.141). Paul Browning remains convinced that peer observation is a vital part of the collegial group concept. He encouraged teachers to find the time
to go into each other's classrooms with the claim that most other professions dealing in areas with large public clientele are doing this these days (Field notes, 13.3.95).

The balance of teacher responses seemed to weigh more heavily towards the negative aspects of collegial groups. Some teachers dismissed them as having few redeeming features:

A waste of time... because most people do seem to be quite resistant to them, then the frequency of meetings gets less and less, so that everyone just avoids them. Sheila T23.446

I hate them because it is a bitch session. Rosemary T18.311

The ones I have been in I don't think have been particularly successful, for whatever reason. Milly T33.199

One problem a number of people identified, was that the success or failure of a group seemed to be idiosyncratic, and overly dependent upon the 'chemistry' generated by the particular individuals in a group. Amy felt that the success of the collegial group was heavily dependent upon the particular grouping of individuals:

I think they function if you've got a few people in the group who actually want it to work. But you have to have a few motivated people in the group to actually want it to work. Last year I was in one that worked really well and I got a great deal out of it. Amy T12.342

Harry agreed with these sentiments:

...collegial groups function according to who's in them... It's amazing, you can have two or three of the same group move on to the next group and the group will still be totally different... it's just a chemistry business. T19.348

In a previous year, Ann had encountered a difficult dynamic in her collegial group:

I had a personality clash with one of the people in there. I didn’t particularly like the way that he communicated...And I wasn’t the only one who didn’t like the way he communicated. So, it was a little bit stilted. T3.240

In a slightly different sense, Carley also felt that the constitution of the groups determined the
benefits she experienced from them:

I haven't really been comfortable with a lot of the colleagues in my group... I haven't felt that I've been able to receive a lot from them. I mean, I'm sure that they have a lot of qualities to impart but it's not the sort of the thing that I was looking for at the time. I guess in hindsight, when I was very happy with the collegial groups, I was with a group of people who shared my personality type and who shared a lot of my aspirations. I thought we worked very well. T40.73

The orchestrated nature of the grouping bothered Tess, in that the timing and the members of the group were an external imposition. She felt that an informal gathering of like-minded teachers would be more beneficial than the collegial group:

They're imposed upon us, and we're expected to have them at times that may not suit us. I think the gathering around a table at any particular lunch hour is as good a collegial group as any... [The collegial group] is constraining. T1.312

Many teachers endorsed Paul's interpretation of the barriers to successful collegial groups, in that they pointed to their lack of time and the busyness of the school week:

Last year, I was in a collegial group where people were fairly reluctant to set aside the time to meet. So we had very few meetings and so therefore, we got as much out of it as we put in to it, which was precious little... Time is probably one of the major constraints. Harry T19.339

We are slack because we haven't got any time to meet. Samantha T28.152

I think that what happens is that people get snowed under and I missed the last one, because I didn't see the notice for it... Time is a real problem. Marie T37.243

I think it comes down to the busyness on the part of the teacher, and the inability to meet at times set by everyone. A lot of people forget, or other people have commitments that are of a higher nature than that, or might have an appointment with someone or whatever. Milly T33.202

Finding the time to set aside for collegial groups and honouring that time as a commitment, is a matter of prioritising activities. The collegial group has been a part of the school's culture for approximately half of its history but it has not hewn itself a position of high priority in teachers' minds. Several teachers spoke of the process of making choices about what can and should be
achieved and what should be rated as less important:

*We all meet at a time when we are free... But often the time that I am free, I use for running off tests or whatever. And if I have a test coming up and I have a collegial group meeting and my test isn't run off, I know which is more important So it's prioritising.* Hazel T36.367

*Even though it's ostensibly a period when you all have a spare, that spare is often already committed in some sense.* Marie T37.248

In part, I believe this to be because teachers see something like the collegial group meeting as separate from the ‘core business’ of their role. Formal collegial interaction is treated as something of an extravagance by teachers. Although, professional development is heavily promoted at Thornton, in the busyness of the school day many other things take precedence over a structured discussion with colleagues, which many see as a luxury they can not afford (see also chapter 7.3 for a discussion of the impact of lack of time on teacher autonomy).

Clearly, teachers’ assessments of the effectiveness of the collegial groups are mixed. There was a strong feeling that they are an admirable idea, but that they are not achieving their potential. In addition, teachers believed that the context in which they are currently working is an overwhelming block to collegial groups working in any meaningful or beneficial fashion. The pressures of other duties which they perceive are more important or rewarding than the collegial meetings or peer observations, prevent them from giving priority to collegial meetings. Despite the emphasis upon professional development at Thornton, teachers see the opportunity for collegial discussion as less important than the battery of other tasks that make up their school week.
The collegial groups fill a void which exists in many schools for a forum in which teachers can discuss issues of broader professional interest and immediate teaching concerns. Darling-Hammond (1986) identifies a need for “teachers to discuss immediate concrete problems of teaching practice on a regular basis if teaching lore is ever to be transformed into meaningful standards of practice” (p.549). She considers it imperative that schools find the time within the school day for such dialogue. Yet at Thornton, where the structure has been established for such talk, teachers cast doubts about their viability.

(iv) Committees

One of the first things that I observed on my initial walk around the Thornton staff common room was a page posted on the staff noticeboard listing sixteen committees, with space after each committee name inviting teachers to ‘sign up’. The committees listed were as follows, with the number in parentheses indicating the number of staff who had signed up at that time: Celebration Evening (14), Magazine (2), Gender Equity (7), Newspaper (2), Staff Club (7), Religious Life (7), Health and Safety (5), Musical (16), Family Day (5), Green Justice (5), Student Representative Council, Parent-Teacher Interview Catering, Professional Development (4), Project Active (4), Computer (6), Teacher Appraisal Committee (15) (Fieldnotes 22.2.95).

This network of committees is advocated by the administration and staff as a way for teachers to have input into the process of decision-making:

...everyone is encouraged to take on some kind of leadership or responsibility in the way that we organise the committees. Joyce T4.132

...basically we believe in committees as effective means of sharing decision-making and action proposals. Spreull T29.130
Teachers fairly universally bemoaned the number of committees but acknowledged the value of their existence and the opportunity they provide for 'having a say':

_The fact that we have a huge number, what seems to be a huge number of committees, that anyone has access to, whether they choose to sit on the committee or even just arrive at a meeting at some stage and have input and leave again. That means of communication is available. Tess T1.302_

There was also an appreciation of the fact that the large number of committees increased the possibility that each individual would find a committee which would particularly interest them.

Teachers placed some importance on the perception that the committees were more than tokenism, and that committees actually produced outcomes and recommendations which were heeded by the administration or School Council and then turned into policy or reality. Johnson (1990a) identifies 'token' collegial structures as a major source of teacher disquiet. She describes the situation in many Massachusetts school districts where teachers are offered opportunities to serve on committees dealing with staff development, student services or curriculum. These committees are purely advisory and lack any decision-making capacity. As a result, "teachers often complained that their efforts on these committees and task forces were futile; they told of written reports that were never read and recommendations ignored by school officials who had had different plans in mind from the outset" (Johnson, 1990a, p.194). William was well aware of the possibility of a similar scenario occurring in schools in Queensland, but he felt that Thornton’s committees were different:

_You are invited to participate in a whole range of committees here, which actually do something... A lot of committees are merely created to make administrators’ lives easy, unfortunately. I don’t think [that’s the case here]. T31.197_

In order to maximise the number of staff involved in committees, membership of most committees is ‘turned over’ every year, so that the tendency for one or two individuals to become exclusively
identified with particular committees is avoided.

Most Thornton teachers appear to be happy to volunteer to participate in committees. Adele Mathews told of experiencing considerable surprise when she first came to the school and saw people volunteer to be members of committees:

_The other thing that stunned me when I first, at one of the first staff meetings that I attended - Richard asked for volunteers for a committee. I thought - oh, god! And there were too many people who volunteered. I mean, I just couldn’t believe it. People will volunteer for things._ A1.600

It should be said that Adele’s initial experience was when the staff was much smaller. But I witnessed a similar ‘volunteer spirit’ at a number of teacher meetings that I attended, and a number of teachers made similar observations:

_One of the things that I’ve noticed here is that often if there’s a call for a committee on something, there’s always people who will do it._ Ben T20.224

I had a concern, borne in part out of my own experience as a teacher, that the same people would volunteer for everything, and thus a small few carry the burden of committee work. This may be an inevitable situation in any workplace, but it was a concern which was confirmed by a number of teachers, including Sheila:

_I think we’d be able to do a lot more here if we had more people involved in doing things._ T23.75

An action sheet from a teachers’ meeting in 1993 reports that a collegial group raised concerns about staff work loads - “Need to spread involvement in extra-voluntary activities more evenly among staff” (Teachers’ meeting action sheet, 19.4.93). One teacher offered an interesting slant on the possibility that the same people bore the burden of most committee work. Monte had made the move to Thornton from an all boys’ school and he hypothesised that the volunteer spirit was a
direct consequence of having more women on staff than men. He suggested that women were 'better volunteers' than men:

\[ \text{I've put it down to the predominance and the significant number of female staff... They're willing to volunteer so much more readily, to committees. They're keen to try things and yes, I haven't worked with a lot of females often enough, but I think that's what I would say - that they're keen to be involved in committees, and to chair committees. I suppose they're taking the initiative, and men, I think by and large, have a sit back and let the ladies take over. Just generally. If a job's to be done and you know, people are volunteering, men are often happy to sit down and let the ladies do it. Monte T26.194} \]

The other dynamic which interested me in the committee culture of the school, was whether teachers felt overt or covert pressure to join committees. I detected nothing as flagrant as I had experienced in one school, where the principal sent around a list at the first staff meeting of the year and said she expected every teacher to sign up for at least one of the activities listed. But the pressure need not be quite so overt as that. Was there an underlying ethos of participation at Thornton emanating from peers and administrators, which forced people into participating? Responses to this question varied. There were some teachers who felt no pressure:

\[ \text{I've never felt pressure, but maybe that's because I've always volunteered. I've never checked to see if everybody's on a committee. I'd be astounded if people weren't on a couple. But no, I wouldn't say that there's pressure. Ann T3.268} \]

Others didn't necessarily use the word 'pressure', but they spoke of an 'expectation' that they would be involved in committees:

\[ \text{Well, you get a choice. I mean it is expected of us to contribute in some way to the school and the list goes on the board each year and they're never short of people who volunteer to go on it. Carley T40.137} \]

As discussed in chapter 3.5, the Thornton way includes a strong emphasis on team-work. The high level of teacher involvement on committees is a significant reflection of the successful acculturation of the staff to this ethos.
Just as teachers’ meetings are lengthy when teachers are invited to contribute in a meaningful manner, so the integration of so many committees into the decision-making processes of the school is a time-consuming activity (a point to be developed in chapter 7.4). Sheila was quite critical of what she saw as Thornton’s cumbersome approach to getting things done:

*I found the meeting process - mass meetings - and I still find them - cumbersome, very cumbersome and not representative of how people in business make decisions or implement policy or do things. T23.34*

The administration team are well aware of the dangers of overloading teachers with committee responsibilities, but as Monte indicates, the co-principals see some tradeoffs which compensate for committee participation:

*I was forewarned about the number of committees at the interview… I was told by one of the co-principals who interviewed me that, “No we don’t have Saturday sport...we don’t have Saturday commitments, but there are some weeks where we’ve had so many things to do through the week - committee meetings and other things, that you wish you could just give up your Saturday. Monte T26.208*

The amount of time that many teachers at Thornton devote to their teaching and co-curricula activities has meant that a few teachers have felt that they simply do not have time to give to committee work. Janice was one of the teachers who felt this way. She applauded the idea of the committees as a way of getting input from a variety of people, but she felt that her other commitments prevented her from becoming involved in them (T43.285). The other people who shared her observation were part-time staff:

*Well, I haven’t been as involved as most people. Being a part-timer I’ve always found it hard enough actually juggling my work and family...so I haven’t given up a lot of extra time. Mary T8.262.*

The sense of belonging to the school community which may grow from participation in the decision-making processes such as committees is admirable, but it may be a particular burden for part-time staff, who are predominantly female. There is a possibility that this avenue for teachers
to make a contribution to the school's development is not benefiting from the full range of staff opinions, if many part-time teachers are not able to make a commitment to committee work. There were a couple of part-time teachers who were involved in several committees, but clearly some part-timers are choosing not to exercise their voice in these forums because they are not present at school for the full school day.

It emerged, therefore, that teachers identified the Thornton committee structure as providing them with valuable opportunities for input into a number of areas of the school's development. They perceived that the committees were empowered to make 'real' decisions and were not therefore, merely tokenistic expressions of consultative decision-making.

(v) School Council

Thornton was established by teachers, as a school to be run by teachers. The governance of the school was designed to attempt to facilitate this goal and the resulting configuration makes Thornton unique amongst independent schools in Queensland. The school is owned by Thornton College Limited, a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Code. Membership of the company is open to teachers and parents and friends of the school, as either Class A members for teachers, or Class B members for parents and friends. The School Council is the Management Committee or Board of Directors of Thornton College Limited. Consisting of eleven people, eight of whom are the elected representatives of the two classes of members of the company, the School Council meets monthly, with an Annual General Meeting held each March. The opportunity for teachers and parents and friends of the school to have such a direct voice in the school council is quite unusual. This point is emphasised in the Information Booklet.
As members of Thornton College Limited, teachers, parents and friends have the privilege to vote at, nominate for or stand for the Council. This is a special opportunity - not available at most other schools - for these stakeholders to be involved in the composition of the School Council. (*Thornton Information Booklet*, p.23)

Any member of the company can stand for election to the School Council.

The presence of teacher representatives on a School Council is not a practice adopted by many other schools in Queensland and this was acknowledged by Richard Simpson and one of the teacher representatives:

*You know, the School Council has four teacher representatives. I think that's quite unique in private schools, that you usually don't have teacher representation on the governing body of most school councils. It brings its problems too, but I think it's very different.* Richard A2.569

*It's one of the only models that I know of where teachers can elect representatives to the school management body, or indeed stand for it themselves. Most schools of this type are run by business persons and maybe the head person gets a look in, and that's about it.* T40.14

The innovativeness of the structure has been the source of considerable pride for some staff:

*I think the way in which the place is run by the School Council, and the very unique way that this company has been set up to make the school grow...I think everybody here has a sense of being a trailblazer.* Barbara T2.559

Although the school has implemented a structure which includes teachers in the governing body of the school, and provides them with the opportunity to voice their opinions through teacher representatives, the degree of involvement of staff on the Council has been uninspiring. Approximately two-thirds of the staff were members of the School Company in 1995 (Field notes, 24.4.95). A number of the teacher representatives spoke of their disappointment at the level of interest amongst staff on Council issues and in particular the lack of interest in becoming a representative on Council:
...we always have a drive for membership (of the company) to renew each year... we always have a drive amongst teachers and parents and it's fairly disappointing on both, but particularly for teachers - that more teachers don't join. And whether it is that they don't care, it doesn't matter - "10 bucks, what do I get for it" - sort of approach...It is disappointing that more staff don't join, and more staff don't show an interest in wanting to stand, so that the people who do stand usually get elected unopposed, which might be satisfaction with them or it could also be lack of initiative or lack of energy from the staff.

This representative went on to say that she thought that part of the explanation for the lack of teacher interest was that teachers were generally satisfied with the way the school was run:

_I think it is a satisfaction zone, that people aren't really upset with the management generally, and they probably don't see what the Council does as directly impacting on their day to day work._

Another teacher representative had experienced a similar lack of interest amongst the staff to run for Council:

_...we tried this time to get other people to stand [for Council], but we can't get anyone else to stand._

She felt that part of the problem was time:

_I think it's that...on top of your load it is really time-consuming. We spent Saturday morning here, and I'd spent the whole Saturday before here on Interview Day, and then we had all those Parent-Teacher nights. I just don't think people have got the time._

Some teachers acknowledged that they had very little interest in the workings of the School Council:

_I haven't thought much about it. Because I do see the Council in a lot of ways dealing with financial and building costs, and that sort of thing, and they don't really trouble me. And the only time they would trouble me is if they were to halve your salaries. I guess I am fairly apathetic about things like that._ Michelle T39.312

_I'm a very uninformed voting member._ Sheila T23.582

_I don't pay too much attention to it - I'm too busy...It's not something that I'd ever want to - I'm not a political person._ Ben T20.641
The concept of teacher representation on the school’s governing body is a real acknowledgement of the founders’ concerns for a collegial and consultative structure for their school. There is, however, an underlying problem with the School Council’s representative structure in that it offers potential for conflict of interest. As an employee of the school and as a member of the body which is in essence the employer, each teacher representative is wearing two hats. This situation was acknowledged by both of the co-principals. Richard Simpson dismissed the chances of it causing a problem. He rather optimistically believed that Council members could adopt the big picture and put aside their individual positions:

\[
\text{It could be a great strength because in that group [the School Council] you have represented all sides...They are sitting there and they are the broad policy making body in the school. And they have to take off their hats and get down to making the best decision for the whole school...There is the question of conflict of interest - there will be four teachers who will ultimately be part of a decision on wage rises and that sort of thing, but I'm really hoping that...I think it is most likely to be a strength. I mean the structure was put in place because that is a collegial structure, to avoid the 'them and us', management and staff situation, that has been so prevalent, and was when the school started. A2.210}
\]

Paul Browning was similarly aware of the potential for conflict but like Richard he expressed faith in the goodwill of the members of the Council and the strength of the Thornton way of doing things:

\[
\text{It has the potential for conflict. But conflict has never yet arisen. And one day it might. There'd be no end of people who put to us in the early stages that it was an impossible situation... I think what keeps it working so far, has been very largely the effort of goodwill. The dominance of the sharing approach. The experience of collaboration. The avoidance of 'them and us' divisions. A3.354}
\]

A striking example of the potential for conflict emerged from the enterprising bargaining process (see note 3 to chapter 3 for an explanation of this process) in which the school was actively engaged during my fieldwork. One of the school’s two employee representatives on the Single Bargaining Unit was also a member of the School Council, and thus also an employer. This
seemed to me to be a particularly flagrant conflict of interest, no matter how well intentioned the individual concerned might be. In addition, two teacher representatives were also members of the Executive of the Thornton chapter of QATIS, the union, one being the union representative at the school (Teachers' meeting action sheet, 6.6.94).

A number of teachers identified a potential conflict in the role of the teacher representatives. Barbara argued that the teacher representatives lose their representativeness when they sit on the Council:

...when it boils down, the class A members have got to stop being teachers and become Council members when they vote. T2.1027

In being called upon to act for the 'greater good' or what Richard calls the interests of the whole school, a teacher representative risks compromising their "representativeness". This possibility calls into question the very nature of the representativeness of the teacher members of Council. I found a distinct polarisation of opinion as to whether teachers thought the teacher representatives were on Council to represent the interests of their stakeholder group - the teachers - or whether once they sat on Council after election they took on something akin a neutral or independent position. Most of the teacher representatives saw themselves as something other than a representative of the teachers, whereas most teachers I spoke to, considered the teacher representatives to be their representatives.

I asked each of the teacher representatives how they saw their role. One was quite firm in her conviction that she represented the teachers:

I see that all teacher councillors should be representing the staff. But I don't think other teacher councillors see it that way.
But two of the others were more equivocal about their roles and tended to endorse Richard Simpson’s view that councillors needed to be advocates for the “greater good”:

*It isn’t so much a teacher rep...in one way we do represent the staff but in other ways, well, the way I see it is we are company directors who run a company with insight into what goes on at the base level, because we happen to be teachers in the school.*

*I’m one of the four elected teachers who represent the teaching staff. At the same time, whilst I represent teachers, and parents represent parents, on any particular body like that, you’ve got to have a global view of the vision of the school and the mission of the school, and what you want to become of the school. So you have to juggle what might be vested teacher interests or might be vested parent interests, and try to get a mediation where everyone’s in a win-win situation.*

Teachers were more definite in their perception that the teacher representatives were their representatives, as indicated by the following comments:

*I think they should be [looking after the interests of teachers]. I think they should be looking after my interests and everybody else’s.* Vivian T34.398

*Well, I believe that they do represent us, but I honestly haven’t had much contact with them in asking them to go to the Council. So I can’t really comment on that. But I feel comfortable that they do represent us.* Paul T35.385.

Criticism of the performance of teacher representatives by teachers tended to hinge on questions about their representativeness and perceptions about their roles as teacher councillors. Whereas the teacher representatives may argue that their votes are cast on the basis of sound, independent judgments, some teachers fear that they have ‘sold out’ and that they are anything but independent in their decisions. Sheila commended the structure of the governance of the school and the existence of a representative forum, but she questioned the effectiveness of some of their representatives:

*I guess I have more confidence in some teacher members on it than others...I think it’s very clear where people’s interests do lie. So they might be staff, but they really don’t see themselves as staff, whereas with others it’s clear that they are teachers, that they are representing teachers and the parents and the students that we teach.* Sheila T23.574
Janice’s comment echoed Sheila’s concern:

> I think it is good that teachers are represented, but I’m not too sure with some of the people who are there representing us whether they’ve got the whole staff’s interests at heart. Janice T43.162

After several years of service on the Council, one of the teacher representatives was now questioning her ability to act effectively in her role:

> I’m beginning to say more and more, I think it’s almost impossible to be a member of staff and to act really effectively on the School Council.

As an external observer, I would suggest that negative assessments of the performance of teacher councillors stem in part from the lack of specification of the nature of their representativeness. Were the role of the teacher representatives to be clarified, the concern about the way some teacher representatives carry out their duties on Council may be alleviated.

As Richard Simpson indicated, the potential for conflict of interest for teacher representatives is most acute when industrial issues may be on the Council agenda. Bob Clancy is a founder and a current teacher representative and he voiced concern about what he perceived as a changing climate in the school with respect to negotiation over industrial issues:

> See, we’ve never had an adversarial set up in the school, ever, about anything. The School Council has been operating now since our inception and we’ve never had a point where a vote has been taken in order to exclude or include an issue. And while we’ve had some pretty wild discussions and differences of opinion, it has never spoiled the collegiality of the Council. However, I’ve got a feeling that...we’ve never had union problems before, because the school has always rung the Union and said - “Look, this is what we’re intending to do, give us some advice.”...There could well be an introduction of the adversarial and I’d say that this year it has appeared on a couple of occasions. T11.576

The negotiations over enterprise bargaining were just beginning at Thornton during my fieldwork, and the Council was soon to be faced with decisions about the school’s stance on the enterprise agreement. One teacher councillor suggested that it would be fit and proper for the teacher
representatives to leave the meeting during discussions about the enterprise agreement, just as Paul and Richard left the meeting when discussions about their salaries were held. Such a process may work in an organisation where infrequent opportunities arise for conflict of interest situations, but in this instance, such a gesture would defeat the purpose of the Council, because in many ways such decisions are the core business of the enterprise. It would also leave the Council open to the accusation from teachers that their representation is merely token.

The question of the token nature of teacher representation did arise during interviews. There was a sense expressed by some teachers, that the teacher representatives had limited power on the Council:

*I think it is important that they do have the opportunity to express opinions, even though I've heard that they're not taken much notice of.* Michelle T39.

This view was contradicted by one of the teacher representatives who argued that the teacher representatives were a potentially potent force on the Council:

*There is the potential, good or bad, for the Council to have quite a negative role or influence on the management and administration of the school. If four teachers stood and were elected who had a certain frame of mind, and they had one or two parents who followed their frame of mind, they could outnumber the rest of the Council and they could literally make things quite difficult for the administration.*

Another teacher representative argued the teacher representatives were window-dressing, because the Council structure worked against teachers acting as a block vote. She felt that the co-principals were the most powerful members of the School Council:

*There are eleven on the School Council. Richard and Paul come and both have a vote and so that's two. The accountant is actually an outsider, and then there's four members of staff. It's very hard to vote against - it has taken us a long time to work out what's going on. But you've almost got a set-up where they're in control. And in most private schools they'd be answering to a much more independent Board of Governors. It is very hard to have any input because of the way it's structured.*
As suggested by this teacher representative, the position of the co-principals on the School Council is particularly potent. As ex-officio members of the School Council and founders of the school, the incumbent co-principals are arguably the individuals with the most overt power in the school community. The extent of the responsibilities and power of a principal in an independent school is quite different from that of a principal in a systemic government or non-government school. The principal of an independent school may be accountable to a School Council or a Board of Governors, but she or he also has more responsibility for decision-making in the school and more freedom to exercise such powers. Richard Simpson reflected on this point:

*I think that a government school principal is a middle manager. Higher up, but still a middle manager, because there's an overriding bureaucracy which makes major decisions that are financial, curricula, whatever. But in a private school, that's not the case. We are chief executive officers.*

In the Thornton arrangement there is considerable potential for either of the two groups of class members on Council to vote as a block and with the co-principals' support, dominate the School Council. The co-principals thus retain the power to cast what could well be seen as the essential vote, were voting to follow class membership. The intention of the founders seems to have been for teachers, who are the Class A members, to control the balance of power on the School Council, as the following statement in the *Thornton Evaluation Report* indicates - “The most important aspect in the composition of the Council is that teachers retain the balance of power” (1992, p.98). However, for teachers to hold the balance of power they are dependent upon the vote of the co-principals. Teachers do not hold that control in their own block of four votes. The school evaluation acknowledged the potential for conflict of interest for the co-principals, in their dual roles as administrators and Council members (1992, p.98). A line in the *Staff Handbook* foreshadows the change to a single principal administrative structure and states that “when the
current arrangement of co-principals ceases to exist, the Council may change to a principal and five people elected by the teachers" (p.7). This future arrangement would maintain an equilibrium in favour of the teaching staff if the principal were to cast his or her vote with them.

Clearly, there are some controversial aspects of the operation of the School Council arising from the potential for conflict of interest and control of the Council by the co-principals. The notion of strong teacher representation on the governing body of a school, does however, provide teachers with a voice in one of the most powerful decision-making bodies in the school. The opportunities such a structure provides for elected representatives of the teaching staff to have a direct voice in the governance of the school, are without comparison in other independent schools in Queensland. Teachers at Thornton identified their ability to directly access this decision-making body as one aspect of the autonomy they perceive in their work.

(vi) Professional Journal

The *Thornton Professional Journal* was launched in 1994 with three editions published in its initial year. It is a collection of staff writings on a range of subjects, distributed to all staff, and it provides another way for teachers to have a voice in the school. The Chairperson of the School Council reported in his annual report of 1995, that the journal was established on the basis of two principles of learning:

(1) It is now well established that reflecting on and writing about one’s work gives us insights that can bring genuine improvement.
(2) It is also well established that an important characteristic of effective schools - and businesses - is that people learn from their colleagues. (Chairperson’s Report to AGM, March 1995, p.1)

These principles are reflected in the quotation which appears on the first page of the journal,
which states that “the best schools are genuine learning communities: a school for their students and a university for their teachers. (Karen Seashore Louis and Matthew Miles)” (Thornton Professional Journal).

The journal is edited by Adele Mathews and one of the school librarians. The librarian spoke of the purpose she envisaged for the journal:

*The idea is that people go to seminars, or people do professional reading, or in some way had a professional development experience, and often times it never gets any publicity or any kind of publication beyond their own notes. So the idea was a professional journal...to be published with...reports from people on various seminars and conferences and things that they’re done. And it’s been fairly successful.*

The bulk of contributions in the first two years of the journal were reports by teachers on professional development activities they attended - conferences, workshops and seminars. Other contributions included personal reflections on school activities, for example: involvement in a school camp; summaries of library resources; and an abstract from an award winning article written by a member of staff. Apart from a few isolated articles such as two by Richard Simpson, on “Time Management” and “Values and work in the Anglican School”, contributions have not been based on professional reading or educational “ideas”. It will be interesting to see if the journal attracts more philosophically orientated pieces as it matures. I was invited by Adele to make a contribution to the journal and I submitted an article which briefly explored some of my understandings of ethnographic research.

The journal has the support of the teaching staff, with Adele Mathews commenting in a teachers’ meeting that over a third of staff contributed to it in the previous year (Field notes 20.2.95). Karlie originally thought that it was going to be a burden to have to write something for it, but
after writing one contribution she became quite excited about the experience:

To begin with I thought - oh, just sounds like more and more work. But in some ways I suppose it is letting the community of Thornton know what is happening with the teachers. And it didn’t take that much time to write up an article for it. So I think it’s good. T14.371

Nina also contributed to the previous year’s journal and she intended writing a piece reporting on a seminar she would be attending in coming weeks. As a part-time teacher who was not always available to socialise during the lunch hours, she felt the journal was a useful source of information about what people were doing:

I find it very interesting, because lots of times it’s only if you’re in the staffroom having morning tea or lunch that you hear about what other teachers are doing. T21.261

One teacher, who had contributed several pieces, was impressed by the idea of the journal, but rather critical of its contents to this date:

I think it is a good idea...I think it is a good way to keep abreast, in a broad sense, of issues. But I don’t think that it actually offers any kind of - there’s no depth there. Sheila T23.467

As indicated in the Chairperson’s annual report, the process of reflection and writing about activities and issues can be valuable professional development. This was recognised by Nina:

It made me think a bit more - obviously it had got something within me going because we’d had quite a lot of reflection over the two and a half days we were there, and I chose to write up that one. Nina T21.281

Several teachers had yet to write anything for the Thornton Professional Journal, but they still enjoyed reading the articles:

I think it is a good idea...Because it is just another way of presenting something that you might want to have other staff look at. For in-depth type things which you haven’t got the opportunity to present otherwise, in say a 15 minute time slot, which seems to be what happens a lot around here, with the time shortage. Getting a chance to meet people you want to communicate with can be a problem. Charles T35.306

It sort of makes me feel a bit guilty that I haven’t done something myself. I really do
enjoy reading them. Harry T19.378

Harry went on to describe the benefit that he drew from reading the journal:

I guess seeing what other people are up to around the ridges and the sort of benefits they have gained out of attending some meeting or other. I guess it’s the only way I keep in contact with what’s going on in education. T19.381

Like other opportunities for teachers to voice their opinions, making the time to write a piece for the journal is a matter of considerable effort. Hazel and Janice spoke of their inability to find the time to put their ideas down in writing:

Again it would be great if I had time to write down the things that I do. But in between all of the other things, it just doesn’t happen. Hazel T36.400

I think it’s good but it comes down to the time factor again, and I often wonder where people find the time. Janice T43.314

The acceptance of a professional journal as a legitimate forum for professional debate and reflection is slowly occurring at Hillbrook, as more teachers come to enjoy the experience of thinking and writing about their practice. The Thornton Professional Journal has the potential to become a forum in which teachers develop and voice their opinions, and potentially influence the decision-making processes in the school.

Chapter summary

Teachers at Thornton expressed their understandings and experience of autonomy at three levels. Firstly, they were concerned with the degree of autonomy they enjoy in their classrooms and in dealings with students. Beyond the classroom were the general working conditions at their place of work which may or may not facilitate a sense of autonomy as teachers. This understanding was about control over a variety of aspects of their working life so that they could exercise personal choices. Teachers applauded the level of freedom they enjoyed in relation to their choice of a
workplace, dress, movement in and out of the school, generosity of leave provisions, access to a crèche, flexible working hours, professional development opportunities and capacity to 'be themselves'. The third expression of their understanding of autonomy was in terms of their sense of having a 'voice' in the school. Their responses indicated that their capacity to influence decision-making through a variety of formal and informal structures and practices in the school was important in developing a perception of a sense of control over their work as teachers.

Thornton emerges from this analysis as a workplace where teachers perceive that they experience relatively high levels of autonomy at the three levels described. Their experiences of individual autonomy are, however, mediated by a number of influences. The pattern of interaction for these influences does not emerge as a simple matter of a series of hierarchical controls over teachers. Rather these mediating influences act as conductors or inhibitors to the level of autonomy perceived by teachers at Thornton, and they will be discussed in the following chapters.
The generally strong perceptions of individual autonomy expressed by teachers at Thornton, are framed by a number of influences which I will discuss in the next three chapters. These influences have various impacts on the individual teacher’s understanding and experience of autonomy at the different levels outlined in the previous chapter. They influence the working lives of teachers at Thornton in the sense that they act as either conductors or inhibitors of individual teacher autonomy.

Some of these influences are exercised by identifiable individual stakeholders or group stakeholders with interests in either the Thornton or broader educational community. Those stakeholders which may be characterised as internal are school leaders, colleagues, students and parents, and these will be discussed in this chapter. The influence of external stakeholders will be examined in chapter 6. Some of the influences which are more appropriately characterised as structural pressures will be discussed in chapter 7.

1. School leaders

(i) Senior administrators

Arguably the stakeholder with the most significant influence over individual teacher autonomy is the school principal. Numerous scholars have supported the importance of the principal to a school’s culture and effectiveness (Boyer, 1983, p.224; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p.186; Goodlad, 1984, p.179; Lortie, 1975, p.196; Metz, 1978, p.188). Goodlad (1984) notes that:

There has been growing support in recent years for the view that the importance of the principal to school quality and improvement is great. Indeed, as with teachers, some
people have gone so far as to claim that ‘everything depends on the principal’. (p.179)

Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) claim that “there is considerable research showing the principal as the central person in setting the working conditions, social system, climate, and culture of a school” (p.186). In light of these claims and the data from Thornton, it is clear that the senior administrators in a school are in a position to exert a very powerful influence over a teacher’s experience of individual autonomy.

At the risk of stating the obvious, Thornton would not be Thornton without Paul Browning and Richard Simpson. Their vision has dominated the development of the school, first as founders and over the past decade as co-principals. The leadership structure at Thornton and the style of leadership offered by them and Adele Mathews are central influences upon teachers and the level of autonomy they experience at the school.

The composition of Thornton’s senior leadership team as two co-principals and a deputy principal is a contrast to the more usual administrative structure in Queensland secondary schools (both state and independent) of a principal and deputy principal, and possibly a number of assistants to the principal. The administrative structure at Thornton is quite idiosyncratic, largely because the division of responsibility between the two co-principals has evolved according to their particular interests, perceived strengths and manner of interaction (as discussed in chapter 3.1). The significance of the personalities of the founders and founding administrators to the structure of the school echoes the central claim of Waller’s (1932) study of schooling, “that the important things that happen in the schools result from the interaction of personalities” (p.1). Richard Simpson acknowledged that he and Paul were quite different and that the areas that we oversee suit us as
people (A2.236). Richard takes responsibility for most curricula matters, and the educational vision of the school. Paul Browning’s role is primarily in administration, which incorporates the overseeing of finances and the development and maintenance of the built environment. In other independent schools, many of Paul’s responsibilities would fall within the ambit of a position such as bursar or business manager.

There was considerable promotion by the co-principals and the deputy, of themselves as an ‘administration team’. In all public displays of power, the co-principals were joined by the female deputy principal, Adele Mathews, in a presentation of equal leaders. Teachers testified to the positioning of these three as a leadership team, but it was an evolving construction of ‘team’, as I sensed teachers often added mention of the female deputy principal as an afterthought to their presentation of the administrators. The question which I asked and could not resolve, was whether this was the result of her less senior position as deputy, her more recent arrival at the school and lack of status as a founder, or her gender.

The leadership team at Thornton has found a level of comfort and harmony in their own roles and in their relationships with each other. There was an easy familiarity about their interactions and I was impressed by the profound respect they showed for each other and other members of staff. Despite the normal hysteria of a school day, each member of the administration team consistently exuded a quiet confidence and calm that permeated the entire school. Jennifer observed that:

...it’s very, very rare where you hear them raise their voice against a student. Most things are done in a controlled manner. I don’t think they would ever put their head into our office and greet us angrily. S9.227

Staff were similarly impressed by their leadership and the way they worked so effectively together
as a team. Megan was a member of the support staff who worked on a daily basis in close proximity to members of the administration team. She was very positive in her evaluation of their working style:

Well, I think they complement each other with their personalities, and they seem to work together very well as a team. S3.164

Other staff expressed similar sentiments about the way the triumvirate worked together:

They work very well together. They definitely work as a team. Nina T21.177

They work as a good team. They sort of match each other up. Barbara T2.745

The trust and respect which the senior administrators showed each other were extended to their relationships with staff. Many teachers expressed the conviction that they felt secure in the knowledge that they were trusted and respected by members of the senior leadership team. Karlie spoke of the respect she felt as a teacher:

I think in yourself as a teacher, you feel as if you're respected, and therefore you put more effort in to it. And because you know that you are respected for what you're doing, and that you are making a contribution and that they [the administrators] realise that. You are appreciated. T14.288

Similarly, Jonathon felt there was an air of trust in the school:

More than anything, the atmosphere of trusting what you do in the classroom and the - you know what you're doing and the attitude I feel here is - you know what you should be doing in your classroom, you make the decisions, and go ahead and do it. T44.79

Trust and respect emerge as foundations for sound working relationships in a school. The significance of these qualities in the dynamics of teacher autonomy will be further explored in chapter 8.

Thornton's founders had a clear conception of the style of leadership they sought to promote. Unsurprisingly, this vision has evolved as the school has grown and as new challenges have been
addressed. But in essence, a philosophical commitment to two central operating principles has remained a constant. These are that the school leadership structures be as non-hierarchical as possible and that decision-making be conducted through consultative and collegial processes. The practice of such a style of leadership has acted as a powerful conductor for strong expressions of individual teacher autonomy at Thornton, but the journey to this end has not been without obstacles. Later in this section I will explore two recent incidents in the school's history which show how tensions relating to decision-making have been played out.

The perception of the existence of non-hierarchical structures in the school is most clearly evident in the observation shared by many teachers that there is a 'flat' structure in the school. During the course of my time in the school, I heard considerable rhetoric about the 'flat structure' of Thornton's administration. Initially, this was reflected in the way the co-principals talked about their leadership role in the school. Richard spoke about the founders' attempts to maintain a flat structure despite a range of pressures to revert to traditional approaches in their style of decision-making:

...our natural way of leading is in a collegial and consultative manner...our structure is as flat as we can make it. It's not hierarchical, we've resisted pressure at times to bring in an hierarchical structure when there've been problems. A2.280

Numerous teachers made reference to the lack of hierarchy in the school or the administrative structure being flat, including the following comments which draw on comparisons between Thornton and other schools:

...it is very definitely a flatter structure in the administration and hierarchy than you would get in other places. Julian T13.71

The staff do see the co-principals and the deputy as being with them, where we're all equal. So there's really no delineation of rank...the organisation of a school can function very effectively without a hierarchical system. Monte T26.51
...this school has deliberately tried to set off on a slightly different tack from a lot of private schools. It has a very different - what is called a flat leadership style...very consensus oriented, very participation oriented, for staff and students. Spreull T29.47

There doesn't seem to be anybody in the school - there doesn't seem to be a hierarchical system, there obviously is when you look at it more closely, but you don't get the impression that some people are more powerful than others, that some people run the school or have more to do with the running of the school than others. Robert T5.95

The commitment to a flat structure is also reflected in the relationships among the three members of the senior leadership team and the nature of their role in the school. The chairing of teachers' meetings is rotated among the three members of the administration team. They hold their own meetings on rotation in each other's office. One teacher, Melissa, mentioned the way she acknowledged their non-hierarchical approach by addressing all her notes to the administration team by rotating their three Christian names. These examples of sharing of certain aspects of the leadership load may seem superficial, but they are potent signposts to leadership practices.

Two factors contributing to the perception of 'flatness' of the administrative structure at Thornton, were the relatively high accessibility of the senior leadership team to staff members and their visibility in all aspects of school life. These aspects of their leadership style were quite evident during my fieldwork.

The issue of the senior leadership's accessibility to teachers has both physical and emotional dimensions. A principal may be physically available to teachers, but whether teachers feel sufficiently comfortable in approaching him or her is quite another matter. Very small things may contribute to the development of such a level of comfort. When I first arrived at Thornton, I was struck by the effort Richard and Paul made to greet me each morning. For a few days I thought
that it was because I was a stranger to the school and it was their way of making me more comfortable in the school. But on further observation, it appeared that Richard in particular, made an effort to greet every member of staff individually, every day. The validity of my own observation was borne out by the comments of many staff members, typified by the following:

...the thing that I do like about here, that I didn't like about the other school, was that the other head, he would walk through the office and not look at you, let alone greet you. Here every day, we are greeted, and we greet them. And I think that is very important. Jennifer S9.233

One of the things that I find most interesting is the way that when you come in of a morning, or during the day, especially with Richard, he always makes a point of saying hello the first time that he sees you during the day. He always acknowledges your presence. That's a little thing, but that's one thing I must say I really admire Richard for. He always goes out of his way - with everyone, first period of contact during the day, he says hello. Nina T21.158

The simple greeting becomes a signpost of the accessibility of the senior administrators, and combined with other aspects of their leadership style, promotes the perception that the hierarchy is limited.

The visibility of the administration team in the school is also worthy of note. The impression among Thornton staff is that the administrators do not distance themselves from the 'ordinary' work of the school. This was an observation that was made earlier in relation to the emphasis on teachers and teaching in the school culture (chapter 3.4). The administrators actively work to maintain their visibility in the school, and this promotes a shared perception of a flatter organisational structure. Unlike principals and deputies in many other schools, members of the senior administration team carry a teaching load as well as their other duties. This was commended by Rebecca:

I mean the admin teach, whereas even the deputies never taught at [school name deleted]...There were four people in the senior admin who never went near a classroom
other than to observe you. Whereas here they all teach, and I think it would be great if that was kept up for ever and ever...I think that's an important part of it too, that they're involved as well, in the day to day running of classrooms and stuff. T25.321

Melissa drew the contrast with administration teams she had encountered in other schools:

When you've got administration who are seen to be working, as compared with some admin groups I've seen, who are seen to be PR only, and don't do very much, that probably provides you with an example in the precedent which people follow. T7.243

As further evidence of the involvement of the administrators in the daily life of the school, Carley mentioned the fact that each member of the administration team is rostered for playground duty (T40.62).

The administration team's accessibility and visibility were a direct reflection of their attempts, either conscious or unconscious, to avoid an 'us and them' dynamic between themselves and the staff. This is a more possible goal in a small school such as Thornton was in its early years, where the small number of staff facilitated a greater intimacy and connection. But even as the staff at Thornton has grown, there has remained a strong staff perception that an 'us and them' division between staff and leadership does not exist:

...they have to communicate as people in a different job rather than as people with a more powerful job. And I see Paul and Richard doing that perfectly. So when we say that we are collegial here, I truly believe it - I don't see 'them and us', I see all of us. And we all have different jobs to do. And that's how we're different, but we're all on the same level as people, which I've never ever experienced at any other school. Chris T15.117

The staff do see the co-principals and the deputy as being with them, where we're all equal. So there's really no delineation of rank...I've come from a school where the hierarchy of the school, the positions in the school were very obvious. And it was drawn to the attention of everyone - it was promoted that way...whereas this school doesn't run like that. And so, we all have different roles to play in this school and no matter what our contribution may be, it is recognised for what it is. I think that's important, it makes you feel worthwhile. Monte T26.51
Despite the success the senior administrators have had in reducing the sense of hierarchy in the school, the reality remains that a hierarchical structure does exist at Thornton. The co-principals are at the top of the structure and they are ultimately responsible for decision-making in the school. This is acknowledged quite clearly in the *Staff Handbook* in a rider to the commitment to a collegial climate, which states that the "ultimate responsibility for decisions lies with the school's Administration team" (p.18). Teachers acknowledged that the co-principals have a different role in the school community, and implicit in this acknowledgement was a recognition of their position in a hierarchy. The following teachers observed that there were differences in roles in the school and that this demanded an acceptance that the administrators had the ultimate right to make decisions:

*So, basically I'm happy not to know, or to have a distance about things that happen. To know that administrators have a different job from me.* Julian T13.114

*There are some things I'm sure within an agenda, that as leaders - this is what we will do. I think that's very fair because that is the role of the leader. Sometimes you have to make decisions that aren't necessarily very popular.* Max T16.509

*..I really think that if you appoint people to be responsible for a certain area, then you trust them to make decisions that then everyone else has to wear or live with, whether they enjoy it or not.* Sheila T23.42

The acknowledgement of a limited hierarchy is not necessarily inconsistent with the school's explicit commitment to consultative decision-making and collegial processes in the school. The *Staff Handbook* states that "Thornton functions wherever possible with a collegial climate" which includes operating within a structure characterised by limited hierarchy (p.18). "Important decisions and activities" are undertaken "after consultation and discussion". The last section of the preceding chapter relates the sense of autonomy teachers derive from being provided with a range of formal and informal forums at which to voice their views. Teachers at Thornton do feel
generally that they have a voice in the decision-making processes at the school and this makes them feel that they have considerable control over what happens in their workplace. These perceptions, however, should be framed by the existence of a limited hierarchical structure of leadership in the school.

Despite strongly expressed commitments to a relatively flat or non-hierarchical structure and consultative and collegial decision-making processes, a number of tensions have emerged in the practice of decision-making in the school. Hierarchies do exist at Thornton and any processes of consultative decision-making remain subject to the ultimate right of the co-principals to make the final decision. I will use two incidents which have occurred in recent years to explore the tensions which result from these realities. Both of these incidents are framed by a specific concern expressed by a number of staff during interviews, that recent decisions by the administration team appeared to have been made either despite opposition from staff or without consultation with staff. What emerged from interviews with a number of teachers was a sense that the processes of decision-making which appear to be founded on collegiality and consultation were at times subverted or weakened by unilateral executive decisions. The sense of control over their work which was generally applauded by teachers at Thornton was compromised for many teachers as a result of these incidents.

The first incident related to student grooming and involved not only tensions about leadership style, but about the gendered nature of social relations and practices. In the cycle of fashion and style, 1994 saw a fashion for long hair among some boys. Existing grooming rules at Thornton apparently did not cater for the longer hair, and a request came from students, for boys to be
allowed to wear long hair in ponytails to school. This issue had also arisen some years earlier, and it was reported then that “admin. cannot support boys wearing hair in a pony tail” (Teachers’ meeting action sheet, 27.4.92).

The revisiting of the issue in 1994 culminated in a discussion at a teachers’ meeting. A group of teachers felt that an equity issue was at stake - if a girl could wear long hair to school if it was in a ponytail, why couldn’t a boy? If a girl could wear earrings to school, why couldn’t a boy? The administration team expressed the concern that the school reputation would be harmed by the presence of boys with long hair or earrings, and they advocated the introduction of rules forbidding these things. My understanding of the incident is that the group advocating that boys be permitted to wear long hair was quite substantial, and was particularly vehement in their opposition to the ruling.

The administration team ultimately decided to introduce grooming and presentation regulations restricting the options available to boys, despite the strong feeling against this decision expressed by a large group of staff. The ruling on hair stated that it should be “worn off students’ faces, and should always be clean and neat. Thornton students are expected to wear their hair in conventional styles, avoiding extremes of fashion”. The administration team reinforced this statement in a brief issues paper on “gender, fashion and student appearance”, which went out to parents in the School Newsletter in March 1995. This paper acknowledged that anti-discrimination legislation required “the equal treatment of girls and boys, though with some exceptions”. These exceptions were not clearly identified, but my interpretation of the paper is that the superior or overriding principle was the reputation of the school:
Personal rights of students need to be balanced with their responsibilities as representatives and ambassadors of the school. The general public make judgements based on appearance. The presentation, grooming and conduct of students in public is the major element - and often the only element - on which people judge the quality of the school. This has major enrolment and marketing implications, because in a very real sense the school is a business. (*School Newsletter*, March 1995, p.4)

The issues paper used an emotive appeal to parents' conservatism and worst fears of adolescent excess, and applied a level of rigid gender stereotyping and implicit homophobia, as seen in the following statements:

If fashion trends in student presentation and grooming are allowed or disallowed on the basis of the latest fashion or gender equity then the precedent is set, and the school has no control over such things as Sinead O'Connor hairstyles, boys wearing dresses (which has occurred in some schools in the USA). This would be an intolerable situation, and would destroy the school's public credibility. The fundamental question, then, is where the school draws the line. (*Thornton Newsletter*, March 1995, p.4)

The conclusion that bald heads and boys in dresses were "intolerable", is for a school with a leadership who would like to see themselves as progressive, a surprisingly conservative and gendered reaction. The decision resounds as an example of rigid, masculinist and hierarchical leadership, where the senior administrators have positioned themselves as the ultimate arbiters on individual appearance, a traditional site for the contestation of patriarchal control of women and minority groups, such as homosexuals. This decision and the process of making it, are in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of leadership expressed by the administrators, and so many of the practices of that leadership I observed in the school.

The reactions of the staff to the process of the decision-making in this incident were mixed, but a large proportion of teachers were still disturbed at the time of my fieldwork, almost a year after the events. They remained angry about what they perceived as inconsistency in decision-making processes and intransigence of the administrators in regard to the final decision. Some teachers
found the administrators’ decision in this case, difficult, if not impossible to rationalise for their students. Sheila was a strong opponent of the decision, and she found herself using it as a ‘life-lesson’ with her Year 12s:

_I just sort of say to them, that this is part of life. And you experience frustration and I do, and part of it is working out what I can win at and what I know I’m going to lose at and yes, what the long term thing is. So in terms of my students, I try to model for them, how you deal with decisions that don’t go your way._ T23.202

Other teachers begrudgingly accepted the final decision and used the ruling ‘from above’ as their defence or rationale with students. For example, Vivian explained that although she may not have agreed with the decision, once it was made, she would support it and enforce it:

_I have to support it. I don’t feel uncomfortable saying to a child - “Look it’s nothing personal to me, but take six of those earrings out of your ears because you know you’re not allowed to wear them”._ T34.382

As a gender issue, the grooming incident highlights the complexity of balancing perceived community norms with educational and equity concerns. Many teachers saw a startling contradiction between many of Thornton’s philosophical commitments, and the decision taken by the administrators, which may have been founded on a concern to maintain the school’s ‘good name’ and reputation. As a leadership issue, the incident highlights the delicate nature of the balance between consultative decision-making and the exercise of the senior administration’s ultimate right to make final decisions.

The second example of tension in the consultative and non-hierarchical decision-making processes at Thornton, involved the creation of a number of new positions of added responsibility at the end of 1994. Appointments were made to these positions by the administration team, without any internal advertisement or public call for applications. Fran sets the scene for this incident:
At the end of last year a number of new positions were created, or old ones vacated because people were moving into new positions in the school. And we were simply told who those people were. And that created a hell of a lot of fighting really... I thought that was really hurtful. Not that I was involved in any of the jobs or wanted any, I just knew other people who hearing about a particular position being available thought - oh, that person would have been a good person for that too. Why didn't they get an opportunity to throw their hat into the ring?

The staff concern was therefore about process. Surprisingly, no one disputed the right of the senior administration team to make the appointments, but teachers did feel that the convention adopted in the past, of administrators 'anointing' particular people into positions, was no longer appropriate, as the following discussion will show.

The tension was exacerbated by the fact that one of those appointed was Rosemary Simpson, the wife of one of the co-principals, which left the administrators open to the allegation of nepotism. Rosemary was appointed to a new position as special needs co-ordinator, without any formal qualification in the area, although she has a wealth of experience in primary and secondary schools and across a range of subject areas. After the appointments were made, a small group of teachers approached Paul and Adele, in person and by letter, to express their concerns. There was a feeling that they could not raise the issue directly with Richard. There was talk of a petition being drawn up to express staff concern, although this was not approved of by some teachers, who refused to sign such a document. The administrators were surprised by the strength of feeling, and Richard in particular, was hurt by the fact that the teachers felt unable to approach him directly. The administrators called a subject co-ordinators' meeting and spoke directly to the issue, attempting to resolve the concerns and heal the hurt. A general round of apologies followed, but the incident has left an air of fragile if not broken trust, and reservations by all sides about the intent and actions of the other parties.
The administration team acknowledged in this instance that they had approached the appointments inappropriately, although the process they adopted had been the 'convention' for internal appointments in the school to date. Fran gave some insights into the situation from her perspective:

> Basically, Richard and Paul have said that they recognise that the way they had done it, that that was the way they've always done it, but that the way that it has been done in the past may not necessarily now be the best way. But they also, and I see their point, they also don't want a situation in the school where you're competing against each other, because that is just as hurtful. So, they're trying to come up with some sort of middle ground of system. Fran T38.402

Richard explained the rationale for previously avoiding advertising for internal appointments:

> We have tried to carefully avoid the scramble for...what position did you get, and who got what. We've really tried to avoid that by asking people to take on positions of responsibility, where there's a need. And not creating a position which people can then vie for. A2.19

But he accepted that a change in process was now necessary, and consequently, expressions of interest will be called for future positions, but specific individuals may be invited to apply. He felt that the administrators had learned a lesson (A2.549), but insisted that they still have to take the decision (A2.522). Adele spoke of the administrators getting it wrong on this occasion:

> We did last year. What we did, we appointed people into positions for this year that we thought really suited the job, they were added positions of responsibility. We thought this person really suited this position, and so we approached them and we worked it all through. Now in hindsight, what we should've done is advertise for applications of interest or expressions of interest...I can see that it's very good to let people have the opportunity to throw their hat in as well. A1.904

In some cases, the reactions of teachers to these two incidents were quite extreme, and the legacy is a degree of cynicism about the style and motives of the administrators, as indicated by the following comments:

> I guess I've never minded working for a dictator, because I have in the past, as long as everyone knows that this is a dictatorship and this is how it goes. But I do resent being
told that you have a say, when you know that you don't. Oh, you might have your say, but a minority say will ultimately be more important. Sheila T23.213

I mean sometimes I think there's a bit of a hidden agenda in the way some decisions are handed down. We have sort of guessed...well, here it is discussed but it's not really being discussed...I think quite a few of the staff are feeling that they don't have as much voice as they used to have. Rebecca T25.69

Why are there such reactions when the teachers are consulted and paid heed to with respect to most decisions? It would seem that the explanation lies in the expectation established for collaboration and consultation. When the administrators do exercise their 'right' to make final decisions and those decisions are contentious, some teachers respond emotively. Because they are consulted, both individually and collectively on so many issues and policies, many teachers find it difficult to accept administration decisions when they are not consulted, or their input appears to have been ignored. Mary's observation supports this interpretation:

...there have been a few instances over the last few years which have rankled because we're so used to having much more say as teaching staff than we would've had in our previous employment...Usually things are discussed ad nauseam at staff meetings, they're brought to collegial group meetings where they're discussed, they're brought to a committee, the committee comes back with its findings, everybody discusses it again and then it might be made policy. There have been a few occasions when admin has felt that it was necessary to make decisions. But it's not the way things are normally done. Mary T8.110 & 130

Some teachers can intellectualise the role and right of the administration to take ultimate responsibility and make decisions which are not supported by the staff, but at an emotional level they find it difficult to accept. Thus, when the administrators have made decisions with respect to issues such as grooming policy and the appointment of individuals to positions of added responsibility, some staff have reacted badly. This is perhaps unsurprising, when seen in light of the constant promotion of the Thornton way and the rhetoric of consultative leadership which permeates the school culture.
In contrast to those teachers who resented the administrators’ exercise of the final say, were those teachers who accepted the status quo, and did not contest the administrators’ rights to make decisions, even when those decisions are controversial. These people accept that there are limitations to their ‘voice’ in the decision-making process. A number of people acknowledged the right of the co-principals to make the ‘ultimate decisions’, as is reflected in the following comments:

...some decisions are made, obviously at an administrative level without a great deal of consultation - I do think that is appropriate. After all a school is a business as well, and I am an employee and I don’t really think that it is up to me to make or have an input into all the decisions that are made. Michelle T39.52

Ultimately I think admin does have to take charge of some issues...Sure take on some staff opinion to get the overall philosophy organised and get some structure to it, but then ultimately the responsibility does lie with them. Charles T35.236

The reality of a consultative and collegial school climate such as observed at Thornton, is that someone still has to make a judgment about which issues, policies or decisions ought to be put on the table for discussion at one of the various fora established in the school. I asked the co-principals how they decide when to refer decisions and when to make them independently. Richard Simpson explained that as a general rule, anything that is going to affect the work of staff, we take to them (A2.492). Clearly, Richard did not apply this dictum to the appointment of teachers to positions of added responsibility, which I would argue directly affected the work of a number of staff. The administrators accept that part of their job is to make decisions, and they see it as important not to burden the staff with having to take them where it is our responsibility (A2.495). He summarised their approach in the following statement:

If there’s a decision that we think doesn’t need to make people empowered or give them ownership over the decision, then we’ve taken it. And if it has, then we’ve used the collegial consultative process. We’ve seen our role as getting it going, setting the agenda and driving it forward. A2.542
Paul Browning echoed Richard’s acceptance that, as co-principals, they had the responsibility to make decisions, and consequently, the decision-making processes at the school were best described as *partial democracy*:

\[
\text{...at the end of the day people are put in positions to take responsibilities, and that basically what the admin team do. And I mean, it's the worst case scenario, but at the end of the day if the school goes down the gurgler, well, we'll be the ones who will be blamed for that and may have to accept responsibilities for that. So I think that's what I mean by partial democracy. A3.378}
\]

I heard some degree of paternalism in Paul and Richard’s responses to questions about when to act consultatively and when not. They sought to ‘protect’ staff from having to deal with certain issues. Their concern not to burden staff with the tedium of routine decision-making may seem commendable, but it is not the only reason that they took ultimate decision-making control. In some cases, they simply did not agree with teachers’ perspectives on issues. When they chose to make what some teachers perceived to be unilateral decision-making, major tensions were produced in the school community.

Nevertheless, the reality of teachers’ working lives is that they are often so busy that they are not interested in knowing every decision made by the administration, and do not want to be involved in the process of making every decision. Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) put this in terms of an integral responsibility of principals to “buffer” teachers from intrusions to their core work:

Teachers particularly rely upon principals to buffer them from parental intrusion, to control troublesome students, to keep colleagues within acceptable bounds, and to maintain a safe and orderly environment. In short, teachers want principals to take care of extra-classroom conditions and intrusions that cause interruptions in their work and reduce their flow of rewards. (p.187)

Such a view was explicitly challenged by Ted and he clearly did not want the administration team at Thornton to shield him from others:
I have heard administrators, a lot of administrators, say, you’ve no idea how much we put ourselves in between you and parents, and in between you and the Education Department, just to field the hot ones for you, to leave you to get on with the teaching. I don’t think that is very productive. You are better off saying, well, let’s hear what they want. T42.328

But there was a sense expressed by a number of teachers that they did not care to be a part of the decision-making on every issue in the school. Julian felt quite strongly that he did not want to be privy to all decisions made by the administration team:

I don’t want to know every decision that the administrators make. And I don’t want to know every single factor that they take into consideration when they make those decisions. Particularly if the decision is not within my immediate realm. T13.109

He went on to place this desire within a recognition of the administrators’ autonomy to perform their job, without inappropriate interference from others, including teachers.

There are clearly limitations to the input that teachers can have to the decision-making process as it is presently structured at Thornton. The founders sought to build a collegial culture with a degree of teacher input to decision-making, but the ultimate power was always intended to be held by the co-principals. The tensions that have emerged in recent years are the result of what I believe are inevitable reactions to being given some control - the desire for more control, and disappointment when such desires are thwarted.

The leadership style of the Thornton administrators is also characterised by the adoption of an approach of non-interference in the work of teachers in the school. This strategy is not explicitly stated in school documentation as are other philosophical commitments, such as limited hierarchy and consultative decision-making, although Paul Browning acknowledged such an approach in the following comment:
I think it is very important that teachers are given as much freedom...as possible...the more freedom they have, the more power they have over their own destiny and their own professional direction. A3.463

Many teachers at Thornton called attention to a lack of interference from the senior administrators and cherished the sense of autonomy this gave them. They perceive that whereas the administration team offer teachers leadership and assistance where needed, they do not go beyond the boundaries that most teachers establish around their work.

Louisa was particularly sensitive to the possibility of interference from administrators, because of her experience at another independent school in Brisbane. She moved to Thornton because of her unhappiness with the philosophy of her previous school and consequent lack of autonomy, which she described as the failure to be left alone. She had a middle management position in that school and she described the principal’s interference in her running of her department:

I had my own plan of what I wanted to do, the areas that I perceived had problems and needed working on, you know, professional development of staff...so I had my own plan, and then there was the principal who would come and say - I don’t want that...forget all that, work on this. T41.33

She went on to describe how this made her feel as a teacher:

...it’s very frustrating because you don’t feel in control of what you’re doing and I wouldn’t always agree with his reasoning for doing things either...I just felt frustrated. T41.46

She had not experienced such interference from the administrators at Thornton and she applauded the freedom she enjoyed to manage her own work.

Interference in schools has commonly been experienced by teachers through inspections of classrooms by principals. The Thornton administrators have not adopted a policy of inspecting or entering teachers’ classrooms, either announced or unannounced. “Possible invasion of the
classroom by administrative superiors bent on evaluation” was identified by teachers in Jackson’s (1968/1990, p.129) study of 50 outstanding elementary school teachers from suburban Chicago schools, as one of the major threats they feared to their autonomy. Uninvited inspections have been a major industrial issue for the independent teachers’ union in Queensland over the years, as some principals have demanded the right to be able to enter teachers’ classrooms to observe what they are doing. When I asked Joyce whether she thought it was appropriate for a member of the administration team to come into her classroom, she replied that it was not the practice adopted by administrators at Thornton, but that it wouldn’t worry her if they chose to do so:

It wouldn’t worry me really, but [they don’t] make a point of doing it...They treat you as though you’re a professional person and you do your job very well. T4.728

A first year teacher had anticipated that a member of the administration team would have wanted to come and ‘inspect’ her teaching:

I don’t have anybody continually looking in at my classes...The admin have said - we are here for support if you need it, but they haven’t pressured me to show them anything.

Thus, teachers at Thornton perceive that they are not subject to interference from the administration team or snap inspections of classrooms.

The inspection of teachers in their classrooms raises the issue of teacher appraisal. A strong reflection of Thornton’s commitment to non-hierarchical structures and the administrators’ positive influence upon teacher autonomy is found somewhat paradoxically in the teacher appraisal process which has been developed and adopted at Thornton. It is paradoxical in the sense that although teacher appraisal has resulted from a push for demonstrable accountability from teachers, teacher unions and schools, by parents, employing authorities, governments and the community in general (Smyth, 1991), and therefore could be interpreted as a challenge to
teachers doing 'whatever they like', at Thornton this challenge has been met by a teacher appraisal approach which is potentially liberating for teachers. This has occurred because the senior administrators have a strong commitment to ensuring that teachers exercise a high degree of control over their own work. They wanted teachers to be in control of appraisal, and did not want certain approaches enforced upon them by external bodies or pressures.

Teacher appraisal is an explosive concept in teaching circles, with the potential to polarise a staff, as advocates and opponents take up their positions (Bollington et al, 1990, p.4; Turner & Clift, 1988, p.160). Teacher appraisal approaches vary among the Australian states, and within Queensland, between the government and non-government sectors. The Queensland Department of Education once used an inspectorial system, but now has a system of appraisal which is school-based. Teachers are appraised internally by members of the administration team in their school, during their first year of service. In independent schools, there has been de facto supervision of teachers by subject co-ordinators or a deputy principal, but there have been few systematic processes established in such schools until relatively recently. This is not to say that principals in independent schools have not in the past inspected and appraised teachers, because they have, but such appraisals tended to be idiosyncratic and informal.

The union response to pressure from employers for the appraisal of teachers has been to support a model which is firmly based on professional development as opposed to performance appraisal. In response to the demands of employers to include an appraisal structure in the recent round of enterprise agreements in the non-government sector, QATIS produced an interim policy on Implementation and Resources of Appraisal Structures and Processes in early 1996. The policy
states that:

The primary focus is the professional development of all employees to enhance the quality of service provided by schools. The process of appraisal is to be a means by which all employees examine their practice and make commitments for their professional development...The fundamental purpose of an appraisal structure and processes is to develop a strong commitment by staff to their own professional growth through critical self-appraisal in order to keep up-to-date with knowledge, skills and abilities which enhance the achievement of the goals of the schools. (QATIS, 1996, p.8)

This policy states that the appraisal process devised by a particular school should be established through consultation with employees, and ultimately result in the creation of a position of Professional Development Co-ordinator in the school.

The germination of Thornton’s teacher appraisal approach clearly began with the administrators, in particular Richard Simpson, but the control of the development of teacher appraisal was quickly turned over to the teachers. Richard saw teacher appraisal as a political issue. He saw other independent schools in Brisbane adopting models with philosophical foundations in accountability and hierarchy, and he did not want the School Council imposing that sort of model at Thornton.

_We’ve done it and handed it to them. And that’s very political but I think in a positive sense because we are doing it in a way that I think that it can work best, with the teachers driving it._ A2.106

Richard returned from his sabbatical to the United States and Canada convinced that teachers had to control the process:

_I came back from America convinced, having looked at teacher appraisal systems there and having done a lot of reading about it, plus some stuff at Harvard - it all just hung together and said - if the teachers don’t drive it, then it’s not going to bring genuine change and improvement._ A2.127

Adele Mathews explains the phases of their deliberations:

_I guess the push now is that teachers are going to have to be more accountable, there’s_
got to be some sort of appraisal process. And most schools are now working on some sort of appraisal system. We had a look. Initially Paul, Richard and I had a look at different systems. We got someone in to talk with us and we looked at different models. And we decided that the model we wanted to work with was one that came from...the teachers, not a hierarchical model.

Paul Browning saw the process of development of their teacher appraisal model as an example of the Thornton way of doing things:

*I think that is a bit of a Thornton way of doing things, which is to look around and see what else is being done to try to borrow the best that is seen elsewhere, but fashion your own product in the process. That is borrowed in part, but designed in-house.*

In 1994, a committee of ten teachers began working with the administration team to establish a process of teacher appraisal. The administrators consciously handed the control of this committee and the development of the teacher appraisal process to a teacher who was 'hand-picked' by them to lead the way. The committee continued information gathering and deliberations, ultimately producing a structure and philosophy founded in both professional development and performance appraisal which was presented to the teachers in late 1994. The feedback from staff was incorporated into a modified model and the process was in place for the beginning of the 1995 school year.

The model adopted focuses on professional development but also incorporates an element of performance appraisal. Despite the potential of some teacher appraisal processes to inhibit teacher autonomy through the enforcement of hierarchical appraisement and control, the strong emphases at Thornton on peer review and teacher control should ensure that their teacher appraisal process will become an active facilitator of teacher autonomy and a liberating influence on teachers. A number of tensions have emerged during the development of the teacher appraisal process, but significantly the Thornton model has actively involved teachers in its creation, so that some of the
fears have been engaged and then dispelled. The spirit of collegiality which permeates the school has aided the introduction of teacher appraisal, as a foundation of trust is already well laid.

It is clear that the influence of the co-principals underpins the entire ethos of the school. The pervasiveness of their influence raised some concerns for me. As I listened and observed during fieldwork at Thornton, I struggled with two interpretations of their style of leadership and position of influence in the school. Were the co-principals’ notions of the Thornton way so prescriptive, that their promotion of them verged on authoritarian? Despite their best intentions, could they be construed as patriarchal in leadership style?

Such allegations may result from a number of perspectives. Firstly, the Thornton experience can be explored from the point of view of Smyth’s (1993) hypothesis about the complexities of collegiality. He argues that in the focus on the technicist aspects of newly introduced collaborative structures in schools, collegiality may be used as a new systemic management tool, endorsed to facilitate greater control over teachers (p.143). He cautions teachers with the warning that with collegiality comes greater external accountability. What he describes as the “management of consent” to such practices, results in “teacher compliance to old underlying forms of authoritarianism” (p.143). Smyth’s perspective is shared by Hargreaves (1994), who coined the term “contrived collegiality” to describe those collaborative working relationships among teachers which are “not spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, fixed in time and space and predictable” (p.195). Hargreaves juxtaposes “contrived collegiality” against his favoured “collaborative cultures”, which he defines as “relatively spontaneous, informal and pervasive collaborative working relationships among teachers which are both social and task-centered in
nature" (p.135). Grimmett (1990) argues that in the imposition of some forms of collegiality in schools, “it has become mandatory that practitioners collaborate voluntarily” (p.1). The result is a “collaborative pretence” in which participants avoid critical evaluations of the underpinning values and beliefs of their practices. In such scenarios, Grimmett (1990, p.2) and Smyth (1993, p.329) argue that participation is seen as an integral element of professionalism and teachers are construed as unprofessional if they resist the collegial enterprise.

A second slightly different slant could be based on the critique raised by some feminists of critical pedagogy. They argue that by prescribing the ‘right’ way of approaching teaching or social change, critical pedagogy has very quickly evolved into a new form of elitism, authoritarianism and patriarchy (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1992; Luke, 1992). Could the strength of support for collegial practices from the co-principals at Thornton be interpreted as paternalistic and result in the enforcement upon teachers of a new form of orthodoxy?

The concerns about the surveillance potential of the mechanisms of collegiality and the accountability measures which inevitably accompany the introduction of school or site-based management on a large scale, may well be justified where collegial structures are implemented on a systemic basis. But Thornton’s administrators are not building a collegial culture which uses consultative decision-making as a control mechanism. To suggest so would be to discount the witness of the teachers at the school, and to ignore their demonstrated capacity to challenge or address such “pedagogic controls” (Smyth, 1993, p.138). Thornton’s teachers are not “compliant accomplices” (Smyth, 1993, p.336) to the production of a collegial culture in the school, but dynamic and critical actors and directors engaged in the creation of such a culture. Collegial
processes are not functioning in this school as forms of “pedagogic control”, but rather are demonstrative of a version of collegiality which is relatively liberating for teachers.

Another interpretation of the co-principals’ leadership which I considered was that in the strength of their personalities, Paul and Richard reflected a particular notion of leadership founded on constructions of the leader as benevolent patriarch. This is a step beyond the model of the manager as aggressive, competitive, tough and male (see for example McGregor, 1967, p.23; Loring & Wells, 1972, p.90), in that the leader shows some of the supposedly feminine qualities of concern and compassion for workers. But the essential leadership style remains founded upon a framework which is hierarchical and which posits values that are stereotypically masculine, such as over-protectiveness.

Much about Paul and Richard’s leadership is not paternalistic, although at times their concern to ‘protect’ staff from perceived threats could be so interpreted. In so many ways, they are what Johnson (1990a) calls “strong, symbolic leaders, who closely tended values, nurtured traditions, inspired staff and students, and personally embodied the high standards that the school espoused” (p.241). But it is in their very strength and degree of influence that their leadership most closely touches on elements of paternalistic styles. This influence is arguably more pervasive and potentially oppressive, in a school where the majority of teachers are female, and possibly more conditioned to be compliant to any leadership, but in particular, male leadership.

The senior administrators at Thornton are strong influences upon the level of autonomy which teachers experience at the school. They express a strong commitment to a style of leadership
which is consultative and collegial, but their actual practice of leadership demonstrates inconsistent applications of their espoused approach. A number of tensions have emerged in recent years which point to a clear hierarchy, albeit limited, and the retention of ultimate decision-making powers in the hands of the co-principals.

(ii) Middle management

In the limited hierarchical structure which exists at Thornton, the layer of personnel below the senior administration team is comprised of subject co-ordinators. These people have the potential to exert significant influence on the working conditions of those teaching in their departments (see Goodlad, 1984, p.9; Lightfoot, 1983, p.126; Little, 1992, p.168). They are powerfully placed to influence the degree of autonomy enjoyed by teachers working in their departments. With responsibility for the curriculum and teaching practices in their particular subject area, the subject co-ordinator’s chosen approach to leadership will have a direct impact on teachers and what they choose to do in classrooms (Johnson, 1990a, p.177).

The subject department in the secondary school is an important context in which to explore teachers’ work, as studies by Johnson (1990b) and Siskin (1994) have found. Siskin’s (1994) study of three comprehensive high schools in the United States led her to conclude that from the perspectives of the teachers in the three schools, “the department is highly visible, and central to understanding the complex workings of their schools: important to who they are, consequential in affecting what they do, and largely determining how their work is perceived” (p.8). Johnson (1990b) similarly found that the subject department was a primary organising and socialising force in the American secondary school.
As middle managers, subject co-ordinators are strategically positioned in relation to the senior administration. Lortie (1975, p.198) argued that subject co-ordinators act as mediators in the authority relationship between teachers and the principal, but I believe the nature of that link will be dependent upon the style of leadership and organisation in a particular school. At Thornton, because of the limited hierarchy and the senior administration team’s collegial approach, teachers and principals are fairly ‘close’, and thus co-ordinators do not act as mediators. They do, however, have the benefit of attending subject co-ordinators’ meetings, which expand their opportunities for voicing opinions and influencing decisions in the school in a way which is not open to other members of staff.

There are no year level co-ordinators or assistants to the principal at Thornton, positions which exist in most secondary schools in Queensland. The focus for middle management at Thornton is therefore on subjects - the curriculum. Hargreaves (1994) argues that certain kinds of teacher collaborations, such as working in subject departments, result in insulated groups of teacher and unproductive competition between such groups, rather than unity and school-wide collaboration (p.213). The size of the school and the strength of school-wide structures for collegiality have prevented the subject departments at Thornton producing the “balkanized” effect described by Hargreaves. Rather, as in Lightfoot’s (1983) portrait of the subject departments at Brookline High School in suburban Boston, Thornton’s subject departments are generally “less expressions of territoriality and image than they are environments of support and exchange” (p.212).

Generally, there was a level of satisfaction and affirmation of the leadership offered by co-ordinators. Most teachers felt a sense of control over their subject areas and encouraged to voice
their vision about their subjects' futures, as the following selection of comments from a range of subject areas indicates:

*I feel in the area where I teach, the department where I teach, I feel I've got a very big voice in what happens...Because of [name deleted]'s style of leadership and also [name deleted]'s style of leadership and also [name deleted]'s style of leadership and also [name deleted]'s style of leadership and also...* [name deleted] is always open to new suggestions and she is really very happy for people to take on organising something new. As long as they're prepared to do the work - she wouldn't stand for people to say: “I think we should do this” and then expect for her to do all of the work. *[name deleted] is very happy for us to organise our units in a different way to her.*

*He offers the style that I work best under personally. More of a work with you, rather than stand at the top, telling you what to do. “What about if we do it this way - we can both” - and we work together. A real guidance type leadership style. He's a ton of support, a really supportive role...He sets out the guidelines but not in an authoritarian way.*

*She's a subject co-ordinator that I really like working for because she's not prescriptive. And because, like she offers help with resourcing and we've got work programs that I really do see value in and like teaching...Her approach means everyone is able to build on their strengths and be like a professional person.*

I asked subject co-ordinators to describe their own style or philosophy of leadership and their responses indicated that they were fairly accurate judges of their own practice on the basis of the close fit between their perceptions and those of teachers in their departments. They identified styles of leadership which focus on providing teachers with the opportunity to control their own work, but with some limitations when they as co-ordinators need to make decisions. The inspiration provided by the senior administrators' leadership comes through very clearly:

*I don’t want to know absolutely everything that goes on in the classrooms of staff who work with me, you know, they have their own autonomy as well.*

*I am a bit like Paul Browning, in that generally you'd like to make decisions together with the other people, BUT, on some occasions you've got to say, sorry I'm making the decision by myself - this is it. The buck stops with me and that's they way it is, I don't care, you can argue till you're black and blue, but this is it. That's rare, but sometimes I have to put down my foot.*

*I look very strongly at co-ordinating the course and not so much the staff. Making it easy...*
for the staff to teach the course, so that there is comprehensive lesson plans if they want them. And it really is more looking after the co-ordination of the curriculum rather than the actual teachers...I don't feel that the teachers I've got with me like [names deleted] really need organisation in their teaching lives...So we’re very collegial basically.
I'm just trying to think of the right word here - probably co-operative. I'm not really a dictatorial person at all. I've actually found that to me, it's my greatest challenge because I'm not an administrator. I'm a teacher...I mean at times I could be a lot better, but I've got a good staff so that's half the battle isn't it?

I hope in many ways that I can emulate some of the styles that Richard, Paul and Adele use, in terms of democratic leadership style - open leadership style. I hope I am approachable. I try to provide an outline in consultation with teachers...and we work out where we’re going for the year.

As I suggested earlier, the style of leadership offered by the senior administration team emerges from these responses as a powerful modelling influence. Most of the co-ordinators clearly aspire to the model of leadership which Richard, Paul and Adele have sought to establish in the school. Subject co-ordinators at Thornton emerge as well-placed in the school to exercise influence upon individual teacher autonomy.

2. Colleagues

Teachers are not solitary workers, despite their frequent separation from adult workers in many classrooms. They are confronted continually with the reality of building relationships with other teachers, either because they willingly seek out collegial contact or because they are forced by the nature of their work to do so. The influence which a teacher's colleagues potentially exert upon his or her work and sense of autonomy, is therefore considerable. The nature of the influence will, however, vary, according to which of the three levels of autonomy (identified in chapter 4 as work in the classroom, life in the school, and voice in decision-making) is being affected.
It could be predicted that the strong emphasis in the Thornton school culture on collegial decision-making and team work, may produce significant restrictions to the autonomy enjoyed by the individual teacher. These restrictions may potentially be concentrated on work in the classroom. Such restrictions may include pressures from colleagues to teach in a particular way, or interact with students in a particular way, or present handouts in a particular way. I found no evidence that teachers at Thornton sensed a reduction in their experience of autonomy in the classroom because of the collegial relations they were encouraged to build. Teachers happily sought out contact with their colleagues and welcomed assistance and support where it was offered. Similarly, Johnson (1990a) found in her study, that “although the teachers in general prized their autonomy, they also expected to exercise that autonomy within a framework that coordinated their efforts with those of other teachers” (p.135).

It must be said, however, that collegial activity at the level of work in the classroom was minimal at Thornton. I observed little team teaching and only limited formal collaborative work in curriculum planning. There was, however, a considerable amount of informal collaboration as teachers shared resources, ideas, handouts or teaching strategies. This scenario fulfils Little’s (1987) conclusion that “the closer one gets to the classroom and to central questions of curriculum and instruction, the fewer are the recorded instances of meaningful, rigorous collaboration” (p.505). In her foreword to a collection of studies exploring individual and collective autonomy, Lieberman (1993) summarises her understanding of the relationship between collegiality and autonomy:

The press of teachers to work together as colleagues is strong, but so also is the desire or perhaps the necessity for teachers to feel that they have the freedom and autonomy as individuals to construct classrooms that make sense to them and their students. (Lieberman in Little & McLaughlin, 1993, p.vii)
Such comments acknowledge the inevitability of teachers working independently in classrooms (Huberman, 1993; Little, 1992), and move away from the negative interpretations of teachers’ solitary work practices that dominated earlier studies of teachers’ work (to be discussed later in this section). The balance which Lieberman implies is appropriate, appears to have been achieved at Thornton, where teachers have a strong sense of autonomy in their classrooms but exhibit strong commitment to the collegial structures and opportunities which are offered in the school organisation: It is clear that the interaction between autonomy and collegiality in a school will be dynamic and contextual, but it need not be inevitably problematic.

The level of autonomy which is arguably most enhanced by influence from colleagues is having a voice in decision-making in a school. Chapter 4.3 outlined the formal and informal processes in the school which facilitated this level of autonomy, all of which were founded on the school’s commitment to collegiality. Teachers perceived that these opportunities to take part in the decision-making processes facilitated a stronger sense of individuality and promoted control over their work as teachers rather than reducing autonomy. The experience of individual autonomy as a teacher apparently does not supplant the need to function as an individual in a group, especially when the group is comprised of colleagues.

The influence of colleagues on individual teacher autonomy raises one of the most constant critiques of teachers’ work practices, that the nature of their work in classrooms results in isolation. Waller (1932, p.49) claimed that teachers were “psychologically isolated from the community”. Lortie (1975) claimed that teachers worked in “egg-crate schools” in a negatively constructed isolation and many scholars have supported and developed his line of argument
(Boyer, 1983, p.158; Goodlad, 1984, p.171; Grant, 1988, p.141; Grumet, 1988, p.93; Huberman, 1993, p.31; Johnson, 1990a, p.7; Lightfoot, 1983; p.384; Perrone, 1985, p.648; Powell et al, 1985, p.308; Steedman, 1982, p.7). Unlike the plethora of educational writers who have construed the independent work of teachers in classrooms as isolated or pathological in nature, I did not find evidence to support such a conclusion at Thornton. Despite describing experiences of high levels of autonomy in their work in classrooms, teachers at Thornton did not talk about experiencing a sense of isolation. There were occasional rumblings about the need for adult company to balance their primary interaction with young people (as discussed in Chapter 4.3(iii)), but the high level of socialising that characterised the interaction in the staff common room, the opportunities for regular collegial contact provided within the school and the strong feeling of ‘belonging’ expressed by most people, seemed to meet these demands.

Isolation was not therefore an inevitable consequence of autonomy in the lives of Thornton’s teachers, because it was balanced by a collegial and sharing working environment (see also Hargreaves, 1994, p.167). This finding is supported by the conclusions of the five-year study conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching in the United States. One of the major conclusions of the study was that teachers’ working contexts are complex, but essentially “open, embedded, and socially constructed” (Siskin, 1994, p.39). Teachers are not immune from the influences of the world around them and the influence of their colleagues on their work goes a long way to mitigating any sense of isolation they may experience.

The nature of the influence colleagues may have upon individual teacher autonomy is going to
vary with each teacher, as determinants such as personality, age, gender, style of teaching and subject specialty also enter into the mix. At Thornton, teachers did not raise the influence of their colleagues as an inhibiting factor on their autonomy. To the contrary, I observed strong indications that where colleagues were involved closely with each other, their influence was exerted so as to facilitate the sense of control that the individual may possess over their work and life in the school.

Teachers’ sense of autonomy at each of the three identified levels identified in the previous chapter (in the classroom, life in the school, and through a voice in decision-making) were influenced by colleagues, but it was not inevitably compromised or reduced by a strong collegial ethos and practice in the school. In fact, the third level of autonomy, voice in decision-making, was clearly facilitated by the school’s commitment to collegiality.

3. Students

The autonomy teachers at Thornton experience in relation to their work is mediated by the nature of the student body, particularly in relation to their capacity to discipline students. This is a point developed by the Richard Lobwein, the President of the union for teachers in independent schools in Queensland (QATIS) in a recent report:

Teachers...are often judged by the behaviour and performance of their students, but do not control some of the most significant variables that are involved. Teachers have more or less ‘influence’ on students depending on their competence, but they never have direct control of the attitudes, motivations and internal worlds of the children that they are working to educate. (1996, p.2)

Thornton’s students are largely cooperative and well-disciplined and require a minimum of regulation from teachers. My impression from attending classes and walking around the school
grounds during lunch hours was that the students were well-behaved. This sense was confirmed by the comments of a number of staff, including some of the support staff. Jane spends most of her time in the main office section of the school and as a result has little contact with students, but she observed that:

...I like what I see of the kids in the playground. They're friendly, there seems to be a lot of supportiveness there between each group...There are trouble spots too, which is really quite disappointing, but that's not unusual for a school. That happens everywhere. There's a nice feeling walking around at lunchtime - they seem to be happy with each other. S7.177

Bob was a teacher with experience in a number of schools and it was his assessment that students at Thornton were well behaved, particularly in comparison to student behaviour in schools in some of Brisbane's lower socio-economic areas:

...even the rogues here are not, I think if some of the staff went to [school names deleted], and were there for a term, they'd come back and think that these kids are angels and they'd help to polish their halos and wings! Because even what might be called our worst students, underneath it they are pretty decent sorts of kids. T11.492

Robert, the exchange teacher from England, was very complimentary about the students he had encountered at Thornton in art classes, and he felt their responsiveness to his teaching was changing him as a teacher:

I haven't had to shout or lose my temper ever since I've been here. You can actually negotiate with children out of class time about their behaviour and the way I think they're working...I'm very conscious of the fact that I'm changing as a person and changing as a teacher while I'm here. T5.183

Where teachers are less consumed by the need to devote time to disciplining students, they are released to devote their energies to teaching. In the past, my own frustration as a teacher in a school with some very difficult students was exacerbated because I perceived I no longer functioned as a teacher, but had become an enforcer and peace-keeper. There was no time for teaching subject matter or organising challenging activities, indeed, I made a conscious effort to
avoid many sound educational strategies, such as small group discussion, because they had the potential to set up difficult discipline contexts in the classroom. The curriculum in such scenarios becomes a secondary consideration, subject to the disciplinary strategies required to bring students to some semblance of control.

In the main, teachers at Thornton were not troubled by discipline issues of a major nature. Where discipline infringements do arise, teachers' positions as authority figures are respected by students, so that they can carry out discipline without recourse to 'bigger sticks'. The operation of the Student Management Team (discussed in chapter 4.1(iii)) has reinforced the role of the individual teacher in dealing with discipline, with support from a team of teachers at each year level. An independent school such as Thornton also has the ultimate control of being able to deny a student a place, either initially or due to student behaviour at school. Paul Browning acknowledges that this is a power that state schools cannot exercise to the same degree:

...it is seen that we have more power and control over our future and of course, in reality we do, and that helps. In the final analysis it is a good deal easier for us to say that a student is not to return to the school, if it comes to that. A3.411

Students were therefore not a significant inhibiting influence upon teacher autonomy at Thornton in terms of their behaviour. They remain, however, a potential influence in the mix of factors contributing to a teacher's experience of autonomy in their work.

4. Parents

In his classic study of teachers and their work, Willard Waller (1932) painted teachers and parents as warring parties doomed to perpetual internecine conflict:

...parents and teachers usually live in a condition of mutual distrust and enmity...The fact
seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfiture of the other. The chasm is frequently covered over, for neither parents nor teachers wish to admit to themselves the uncomfortable implications of their animosity, but on occasion it can make itself clear enough. (p.68)

Descriptions of the relationship in battle metaphors have continued in the work of more recent commentators, including that of Powell, Farrar and Cohen (1985), who write of the “fundamental institutional treaty” which is the alliance between family and school (p.206). It may be overstating the relationship, to describe teacher and parents as enemies, nevertheless, as a major stakeholder group in schools, parents are in a position to exert influence over teachers’ experience of autonomy in their work, and this may on occasions be experienced by teachers as a confrontational relationship.

Organisationally, parents are an amorphous group in schools, even where they come together to meet and lobby formally as Parents and Friends/Parents and Citizens groups. Involvement in such groups by large numbers of parents is rare, and their agendas are often driven by a small group of earnest and dedicated volunteers. Despite their inevitable lack of representativeness, such groups wield considerable power in the politics of schools.

The more common interface between teachers and parents is in relation to the individual student. Not surprisingly, most parents have their own child’s welfare as their primary concern, and their energies and involvement in a school are devoted to the immediate needs of that individual child, not furthering the greater good of the entire school community.

Parents as a group are the symbolic holders of considerable influence over teachers and their work. It could be argued that the concept of ‘parents’ has been reified by teachers, as references
during any staff meeting will testify - 'what will parents think about this'; 'should we notify parents'; 'parents may not like that'. Dreeben (1970) points to this divide between the actual and symbolic power held by parents in his recognition of their ideological role in the authority structure of schools. He notes that “parents, as taxpayers, as members of organized groups... and as holders of an ideology encouraging participation in school affairs, should be considered part of the authority structure of schools (since schools are agencies of local government)” (p.75).

Parents in independent schools possess an even mightier power base than their counterparts in state schools, because they are more directly paying customers than the taxpayer who makes the choice to send her child to a state school. The payment of fees for educational services, creates a contractual relationship between parents and a school. Most teachers seem to feel that the fact parents are paying fees does make them as teachers that bit more accountable, as Joyce’s comment indicates:

...I think also in a fee paying school you’re very accountable to that community. I guess when I first came here I felt more accountable for my teaching and my job and everything I did, than I ever did in the state system...I felt as though parents were paying fees, big fees, for their kids, and parents cared. T4.187

This relationship may embed a heightened sense of accountability in the teacher-parent dyad with consequent concerns of a legalistic nature. As noted by Cohn and Kottkamp (1993), “today, the power of parents over teachers manifests itself in an entirely new way that has had a profound effect on teacher behavior - the threat of lawsuits” (p.101).

I would argue that such perceptions are realistic but should not be the only way for teachers to frame their relationships with parents. Such a contract also has the potential to reassure teachers that parents support them and the school’s goals, because of the active choice of the school made
by parents. Many parents who choose to send their children to an independent school do so with some awareness of the school's publicly articulated goals and certainly an initial acceptance, if not endorsement of those goals. Teachers at Thornton were well aware of the strength of this element of the independent school. Fran acknowledged that the majority of parents are in support of the philosophy of the school, and that this gave the teacher a certain degree of freedom, so long as her or his actions could be justified within the parameters of the school's goals and philosophy:

So I think you can justify, if you said something which perhaps can be taken wrongly or that parents might challenge with you, you can justify it. T38.40

An interpretation of the parental contract with the school focusing on their implicit support for the school's mission, should provide teachers with affirmation rather than cause for concern. Sharon acknowledged this when she compared the situation at Thornton with state schools:

...the very nature of the state system, you don't have the fact that people have specifically chosen to go there and hence there's a commonality of at least the parents' views of education or what they're seeking for their children. T30.87

As fee-paying institutions, independent schools have traditionally drawn the largest part of the clientele from higher socio-economic groups, although this has not necessarily been the pattern for systemic Catholic schools in Australia. A number of researchers have explored the connection between parents' socioeconomic status and the level and nature of their involvement in their children's education. A detailed study of this area is reported in Annette Lareau's work, Home Advantage (1989). Two central themes emerge from her study of school communities in the United States - the interconnectedness between upper-middle-class families and their school, and the separation between the working-class families and their school. In contrast to the correlation between parental involvement and their socio-economic background found in Lareau's study, several recent studies reveal a different scenario. Johnson's (1990a) findings led her to conclude
that "despite extensive evidence that socioeconomic status was associated with levels of parental involvement, wealth did not inevitably lead to more productive home/school relations. Independent school teachers told of parents who rarely saw their children and who had delegated all responsibility for education to the schools" (p.92). In a similar vein, Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) found that stereotypical associations were not borne out by their study:

While the familiar stereotype of parents in poor neighborhoods is that they are uninvolved, the corresponding stereotype of parents in affluent neighborhoods is that they are highly involved in the schools. Our data, however, show that teachers working in all types of neighborhoods condemn parents' lack of interest. (p.98)

Thornton draws on a mixed clientele in terms of parental socio-economic status. It is a school which may be described as community-based, since it has initially been heavily dependent on families in the local area sending their children to the school. This is in contrast to the more established independent schools in Brisbane, particularly those belonging to what is known as the Greater Public Schools (GPS) grouping. Generally, these schools were established either late last century or early this century, and are situated in inner city areas without local feeder schools. They rely on their long-standing reputations to attract students from all over the city. Rosemary Simpson conducted some research into the socio-economic background of incoming families early in Thornton's history. She was pleased to see that the school was attracting a big share of what she described as blue collar parents. She argued that because of their fairly low fee structure (discussed in chapter 3.6(I)), the school had been able to maintain a mixed socio-economic population.

Teachers in independent schools may find their status as professionals to be less secure than teachers working in school communities in lower socio-economic areas, where teachers may be
seen as workers with considerable status. Lareau (1989) draws a distinction between the ways in which working-class parents in her study treated teachers and the ways middle-class parents interacted with teachers. She argues that “working-class parents granted teachers full professional status”, in contrast to middle-class parents who were more critical and interventionist in their children's education (p.59 and p.78). Teachers in “prestigious schools” in Johnson’s (1990a) study made a distinction between those parents who approached teachers as equals and those who saw them as subordinates:

Predictably, teachers working in schools that served upper-middle-class or wealthy populations were more likely to report that parents challenged their practices than were teachers in working-class or low-income communities. Where teachers held positions of superior status, few parents complained; where teachers were outranked in training or status by large numbers of professionals, they were subject to more constant oversight and frequent criticism. (p.95)

When the layperson is a well-educated professional herself or himself, the possibility for influence may increase. In their study of 15 high schools in the United States over a three year period, Powell, Farrar and Cohen (1985) reported that the educational background of parents had a significant impact on their level of involvement in their children's school. They found that the "educational background of parents strongly influences their capacity to be an informed and effective pressure group for their children...Their children had a palpable advantage" (p.178).

Teachers in a study by Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) highlighted the increase in the proportion of educated parents in past decades and the implications of such a changing parental body for teachers. The teachers' experience was that many of these parents felt that they “have the right to interrupt classroom activities, question teacher decision-making, and even go over the heads of teachers and principals to the district central office or the board of education” (p.107). Jonathan was quite definite that parents at Thornton did not interfere in what he was doing as a teacher, but
he was well aware of the ability of parents to voice their concerns:

...people who are sending their kids here expect a certain amount and they pay for it, and if it doesn't match up to their expectations, then they tend to be the sort of people who are self-assured enough to complain about it. T44.100

Another way of viewing a highly professionalised parent body is that they are more likely to respect the professional conduct of teachers because of their own educational preparation. Barbara made this inference in her observation that a lot of parents at Thornton were teachers themselves:

...there are a lot of parents who are teaching, for that reason...they tend to respect our work possibly more than parents in the big community...and a lot of professional people are parents, and tend to respect our expertise. T2.800

Two clear perspectives emerge from the way teachers at Thornton describe their attitudes to parents and the impact parents have on their perceptions of autonomy. There is a minority view that parents at Thornton are overly vigilant in their interest in the schooling of their children, and that this results in them interfering more than parents in most state schools. Thus, such parents are perceived as presenting serious constraints to a teacher's experience of autonomy. The other perspective, which was more commonly held, portrays Thornton parents as being more interested, involved and supportive of the endeavours of the school in providing an education for their children, than parents in state schools. The involvement of such parents is endorsed by teachers as a valuable adjunct to the delivery of educational offerings at the school.

Parental expectations loomed as a significant preoccupation of the teaching staff at Thornton. At the first teachers' meeting I attended, Richard Simpson spoke about people generally becoming more demanding of their institutions, and that this included parents in their expectations of schools. He expressed the administration team's perception that they were giving more time,
listening more and explaining more to parents than ever before - *We do appear to be in an age of higher expectations and more demanding clientele*. He said that although parents were supportive of the school, they were also calling for the right to say - *We want the right to negotiate with you* (Field notes, 20.2.95). These comments were followed up at a teachers' meeting by Adele Mathews some weeks later. The Interview Day (for prospective parents and students enrolling the next year) had taken place the previous weekend, and Adele asked staff if they felt that parents were demanding more accountability from them. There was a general murmur of agreement and nodding of heads in response (Field notes, 13.3.95). Richard's attempts at raising staff consciousness about parental expectations succeeded, judging by informal conversations at lunchtime and formal interviews. I was part of several conversations in the coming days about parents and teacher accountability. Some weeks later, Sharon commented that:

*Richard has said a few times, he has raised the issue, that parents, as with anything these days, that they are expecting more, and I don't know if that's just because I'm here or whether that's education in general. But I think parents are expecting more these days.*

T30.100

One of the currently popular educational policy platforms espoused by political parties in Australia is that “parents are equal partners” in the educational equation. Lareau (1989) argues that findings from her study led her to conclude that “teachers did not...want to be equals with parents”, rather that they wanted a “professional-client relationship”, where both parents and their children were cast in the roles of clients (p.35). This perspective is borne out by a number of teachers at Thornton. Tess was clearly of the mind that the professional-client relationship should be supreme:

*I say quite often that we are qualified professionals, which is more than most parents can say about being parents. I think we are, it seems to me quite ironic that we're*
Tess is identifying a dilemma raised by Dreeben (1970) in his example of parents working as volunteers in classrooms. He argues that parents in the classroom, “even when defined as helpers, leave the teacher exposed to the purview of laymen [sic]...What looks bad to a layman, when the event is taken out of context, may indeed represent highly defensible practice” (p.77). Tess’s concern is interesting when considered in light of the finding of this study that classroom autonomy was the most treasured aspect of autonomy for teachers at Thornton. Other research supports the conclusion that when parents do get involved in schools, they seldom influence the actual classroom practices of individual teachers. Goodlad (1984) drew on his study of 38 schools from diverse communities across the United States, to conclude that “in general, parents appeared not to be intensively involved in setting goals or planning curricula for their schools” (p.138).

As stakeholders in the Thornton educational community, parents are, as a group, and as individuals, capable of exerting considerable influence over an individual teacher in their work. Their influence may be overt in terms of influencing decisions made at the School Council through the parent representatives, or through contact with individual teachers. Their influence is also, however, capable of being symbolic, in that parents loom in teachers’ minds as a group of reified significance, with influence which is constantly in circulation in the individual and collective consciousness of teachers.
Chapter summary

Four groups of people at Thornton emerged as having the potential to exert significant influence on teachers' experience of individual autonomy in their work - school leaders, colleagues, students and parents.

The senior administration team was perceived by teachers to be generally supportive of teacher autonomy in their commitment to 'flat' structures and consultative decision-making, but several incidents in recent years had cast a shadow over the trust and respect some teachers had for them, and the school's decision-making processes. There was evidence of considerable promotion of the school leadership as an administration team, comprised of the co-principals and the deputy, but the two male principals were at the top of the limited hierarchy that exists in the school. Several examples of their exercise of power could be construed as authoritarian and patriarchal, despite their best efforts to lead in a non-hierarchical, non-masculinist fashion.

Subject co-ordinators were found to be strategically placed to exert considerable influence upon individual teacher autonomy. At Thornton, they were generally perceived by teachers as strong facilitators of individual teacher autonomy.

The influence of colleagues upon teachers' experience of individual autonomy was shown to be quite positive at Thornton. Formal collegial interactions through structures such as collegial groups and committees were not perceived to inhibit teacher autonomy in the classroom, and were seen to promote teachers' voice in the decision-making processes in the school. The influence of students upon teacher autonomy at Thornton was interpreted as benign, because they
were generally well-behaved and posed little challenge to the authority of teachers in classrooms or the school. Parents were perceived by teachers at Thornton to be generally supportive and non-interfering in their interactions with teachers, although their influence was acknowledged as a potential inhibitor to teacher autonomy.
CHAPTER SIX EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCES

The previous chapter focused upon influences by stakeholders who were internal to the Thornton educational community. This chapter explores the influences which were exerted upon individual teacher autonomy by stakeholders outside of the immediate Thornton community. The external stakeholders which emerged as influences from the case study of Thornton were the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies; and the union representing teachers in independent schools in Queensland. Two other stakeholders are mentioned briefly, because of their influence on constructions of collective teacher autonomy, although their influence on individual teacher autonomy is minimal. These are the Board of Teacher Registration in Queensland and the national organisation for teachers, the Australian Teaching Council.

1. The Board of Senior Secondary School Studies

For teachers at Thornton in 1995, the major external influence upon their work was the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS)*. As an independent school, Thornton could, if it wished, choose not to follow Board requirements on areas such as assessment, but as a result its students would not be issued with a Senior Certificate or Tertiary Entrance Statement. Following Board requirements is in the end an essential marketing tool for the school, because prospective parents would be unlikely to send their children to a school without Board sanction of subjects. So inevitably, independent schools follow Board guidelines and requirements, as do the state schools.

* The role of the BSSSS is outlined in Appendix A in relation to the broader Queensland educational context.
Teachers at Thornton generally accepted the level of state control over curriculum and assessment that results from the influence of the BSSSS. They acknowledged that the Board performs a function that is necessary and inevitable, in a situation where a level of comparability and accountability in education are community expectations. This is not to say that all Board decisions or procedures are accepted without complaint. At least one Board decision made during the time I was at Thornton, caused an adverse, fiery reaction from staff. Early in 1995 the BSSSS made the decision to set the due date for the ‘October Submission’ (a major comparability stage in the preparation of school-based assessment for inclusion in a student’s tertiary entrance statement) as the day before the September holidays. This was received with considerable frustration and anger by teachers at Thornton (and at many other schools), because the previous due date had given teachers more time to prepare this vital submission. The decision was announced following little, if any, consultation with teachers in schools. The Director of the Board, John Pitman, presented it to schools as a fait accompli, blaming the Department of Education because of its imposition of certain other deadlines.

The day after the issuing of the directive by the Board, I came across Richard Simpson in the staff common room. He seemed particularly annoyed by the decision and said that he thought the school would write to parents to tell them about the serious implications of the decision. He went on to say: *Here we are trying to tell everyone how professional we are, but then we are given no choice about something like this* (Field notes, 23.2.95). This issue was also discussed some weeks later at a subject co-ordinators’ meeting. Richard led the discussion by telling of John Pitman’s response when he was questioned about the logic of the decision - *He said - “Don’t ask me that”*. Richard went on to say - *Imagine the response if we tried that sort of approach on the*
One teacher suggested that there should be a mass resignation of teachers from Board panels, but the general feeling was that there was nothing that teachers or schools could do to change the Board decision. There was an overpowering sense of powerlessness about the issue, and Richard concluded the discussion with the assertion that *September holidays are things of the past* (Field notes, 6.3.95).

The influence of the BSSSS is difficult to quantify. It reaches into many facets of school life, including the monitoring of work programs and assessment, and certification of students. Richard Simpson compares the Queensland situation with American education, and although acknowledging that the Queensland process can "inhibit educational practices", he does not question the conceptual basis of it. He concludes that:

...the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies is more prescriptive about the nature of high school courses than is the case in America, and the moderation and scrutiny of assessment instruments and student work - all done by teachers through review panels - have virtually no counterpart there. *(Report on Study Leave, 1993, p.33)*

Paul Browning commented on the constraint of the BSSSS in terms of classroom operation:

*A major, major constraint in my mind is still obviously the Board - syllabus documents, Board registered subject or whatever.*

When I asked whether he thought that such a constraint was unreasonable, he replied that he did not think so - *I mean we have an accountability to the wider society* (A3.421). He did not see the Board requirements as necessarily impinging on the school philosophy:

*I feel that we need to be accountable to society at large in our education and I mean there are lots of ways around those sort of - there are all sorts of other solutions that can be found in other academic philosophies. A3.438*

Ross and Chris both felt autonomous in terms of subject matter and approach, but they recognized that the BSSSS prescribed certain things in syllabuses and other directives which had
an impact on their teaching:

Independent? Yes, I don't feel that what I'm teaching is being dictated to in any way. As far as the school's concerned, I mean you've got to follow the syllabus haven't you, and all the Board requirements, but outside that, yes, I have autonomy. Ross T32

I literally can do what I like. Obviously we've got the restraints of the Board, but I've set up a ...program which is completely different from any other school, which you are not allowed to do in any other school. Chris T15

The Board's influence over assessment in schools was acknowledged by teachers as being considerable, but it was accepted as an inevitability and not perceived to be an unacceptable challenge to individual teacher autonomy. Assessment may be school-based in Queensland, but the Board has the power through syllabuses and subject committees to influence the assessment carried out in each school in Years 11 and 12. Ann spoke at some length about how assessment had an impact on her work as a teacher:

Sometimes some of the assessment constraints, and then the fact that, not specifically any one incident, just the fact that you always have to be mindful that you're accountable and that inevitably people will compare the performance of your class against other people's classes, where it's really not appropriate. Because you might have smarter kids, and therefore your kids will do better. So I struggle with the fact that our world, or that our society expects kids to be continuously assessed...So yes, I feel that so much you always have to have in the back of your mind - they're going to do a test, or a performance or present something to me in six weeks time, and I've got to be sure that they're as prepared as they possibly can be, and so they won't be disadvantaged in any way. T3.611

Chris felt that whereas some of the constraints set down by the Board over curriculum were necessary, she was less accepting of their regulation of assessment:

...the whole of the Board instructions to us, when it comes down to the nitty gritty, comes down to how we assess - and I hate assessment. The continual need to prove, you know, that they've academically learnt something. A lot of experiences are things that can't necessarily be put down on paper. T15.237

Sheila found externally enforced assessment requirements to be a constraint on her choices and decisions as a teacher:
I guess the rigours of assessment tends to - determine - may tend to restrict autonomy at times. Knowing that you have got to teach this novel to this poor child, where really if there were alternatives you would not. T23.309

The ready acceptance of the Board requirements for assessment reflect a high degree of compliance from teachers, which in many ways negates their own perceptions of autonomy in their work in the classroom. Board requirements clearly do influence teachers’ autonomy in their work.

One of the interesting manifestations of power in Queensland education, is the degree of influence teachers in independent schools have over Board operations. The Board is run by a small number of permanent Board employees, but the majority of the Board’s professional staff are teachers seconded from schools on contracts. The number of Board staff seconded from independent schools or having a teaching background in independent schools is significant. The administrators and some teachers at Thornton have recognised that there are ways to position themselves and the school more strategically in relation to Board processes, so that their voices can be heard. They have, as a result, made concerted efforts to participate on Board committees, panels and representative structures, attempting to have influence the politics of state control of education. Such involvement by Thornton teachers is a way of keeping informed and ensuring some level of influence over decisions made at the Board. One important level of involvement for teachers is on district and state panels for subject areas. Ross is a member of a subject panel in a subject which he coordinates at Thornton. He spoke of the way his participation helps him in his job:

It helps a lot. You get to see what other people are doing, we get to discuss the effectiveness of different approaches to assessment, give ideas for what to do, and how you can broaden. T35.96

Joyce and Vivian’s memberships of district panels had been equally beneficial:
It's been incredible. I've had a lot of good opportunities given to me in doing that... The experience of putting a submission together and actually getting to go to a monitoring meeting and getting to see other schools' submissions, actually gave me a lot of confidence. Vivian T34.170

I think it gives you a bigger picture of what's going on. I think when you're in a private school, you're very much out of that... I think you've got to keep abreast of what's going on in other schools. Joyce T4.824

The BSSSS exercises considerable influence at Thornton, with a direct impact on the way teachers work, but it was not perceived by teachers to be omnipotent or impenetrable in its control. This perception may be influenced by a high level of compliance amongst Thornton's teachers, or a fatalistic resignation to the inevitability of the control of the Board. But it may also be that teachers saw involvement on the various committees and representative structures operated by the Board, to be a powerful way of influencing decision-making at this level of education in Queensland.

2. The Union

As workers in an independent school, teachers at Thornton have one union which they can join voluntarily - the Queensland Association of Teachers in Independent Schools (QATIS). The Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) represents the interests of teachers working in the state sector. Industrial conditions for workers in Australia are governed by awards, which are legal documents 'owned' by the registered union recognised in the award. *The Teachers' Award - Non-Governmental Schools* governs the industrial rights and conditions of all teachers in the non-government sector except those who are in "Holy Orders or are members of a recognised religious teaching order or are Church workers" (*Queensland Industrial Gazette*, 1983, p.1). This award applies to all teachers in non-government schools in Queensland, whether they are
members of QATIS or not. The influence which QATIS exerts over individual teacher autonomy is overt in the sense that working conditions for teachers are negotiated through the union, but there are also more subtle manifestations of union influence which reach into the working lives of teachers at Thornton. The capacity of the union to exercise influence upon the collective autonomy of teachers is considerable, but will not be addressed in this study.

The presence of a teachers' union complicates the dynamics of teacher-administrator relationships in all schools, but particularly in a school which is founded on collegiality and consultative decision-making. Unions are founded on the presumption that 'us and them' (worker/employer) relationships characterise the workplace; that workers need to be collectively represented by organisations external to that workplace and that workers 'speak' to employers indirectly, through the union. In contrast, the Thornton way has been to cultivate a school culture which does not include an 'us and them' division between teachers and administrators; where decisions are made consultatively rather than handed down by those at the top of a hierarchical structure; and where the goal is for conflict to be avoided by direct negotiation between individuals and groups on staff. The union's raison d'être is quite oppositional to the philosophical foundation which drives Thornton.

This pattern of labour relations is endorsed by the conclusions of Cohn and Kottkamp (1993), who argue that "unions limit autonomy for members as well as management" (p.210). As another layer of control over the individual teacher, unions function to "drive teacher work toward a labor-like condition grounded in technical-rational assumptions. Within these assumptions, tasks become more rationalized, preplanned, routinized, and directed through inspection and
monitoring” (p.210). This scenario is not structurally embedded, however, as the cultures of individual schools and their principals can mediate the impact of union influence (p.211).

Despite efforts by all parties in the Thornton situation to fashion relationships which reconcile the fundamental mismatch between the union’s approach and that of the school, tensions have emerged. The unique governing structure of Thornton contributes to the complexity of the relationships between the union, employer, teachers and administrators. The co-principals are founders of the school and members of the School Council, the body which is in essence the owner of the school and the employing authority. Therefore, Richard Simpson and Paul Browning wear hats as employers, school executives and teachers. A number of teachers are members of the School Council, and thus they wear hats as employers and employees. Some of these teacher councillors are also active union members with formal positions in the school’s union chapter. The potential for conflict of interests in this intersection of roles is considerable.

Thornton was founded by teachers who clearly believe in unions and are committed to the role they play in the Australian workplace. As a result the school’s relationship with the union has been direct, consultative and amicable since its foundation. Bob explains:

...We’ve never had union problems before, because the school has always rung the union and said - “Look, this is what we’re intending to do, give us some advice.” I think that we could well be - there could be an introduction of the adversarial, and I’d say that this year its appeared on a couple of occasions. T11.583

Richard Simpson agreed that the administration had adopted a proactive approach in dealing with the union, including the recent instigation of regular meetings with union chapter representatives:

...always take a very positive role towards QATIS. We’ve always got on well with the people there...We are just trying to be proactive again and so we meet, and we invite them to bring any matters and we bring things too. A2.178
The recent industrial agenda of enterprise bargaining has aggravated the tension between teachers and administrators/employers. The ideal of enterprise bargaining as an amicably negotiated agreement between workers and employers in the interests of improved productivity is seldom realised. Rather, it would seem that the process tends to force employers and employees into an adversarial relationship. As Tania noted:

*It doesn't matter where you work, or no matter who your employer is, they are going to try and get the best deal for themselves. I mean, even if they are your workmates - John's job is to get the best deal for Thornton, whereas mine is to get the best deal for me.*  
T27.396

The system generates animosity between workers and employers, as workers interpret the bargain as being based on an implicit presumption that workers are holding something back, that they can work harder and 'smarter' than they are currently. Vivian raised this issue during an enterprise bargaining meeting, when she argued that enterprise bargaining:

*Seems to be premised on people only doing the minimum whereas teachers are already doing more.* (Field notes, 24.4.95)

Other teachers concurred with Vivian's perspective, arguing that it would seem that effective and hard workers, such as teachers at Thornton, were going to be penalised, because at their current levels of work they would find it difficult to show future productivity gains. Georgia explained that:

*...it's heaven on earth here - everyone enjoys working here, no one's going to leave. But at times that can work against us, industrially, because you know the idea of productivity comes into whether people are happy here. We're very happy here, so our productivity is higher.* Georgia T6.648

The union representative who was present at that meeting acknowledged that this was a real problem:

*I don't think you'd find any more efficient people than schoolteachers. The issue of productivity is challenging because they are already efficient.* (Field notes, 24.4.95)
For teachers, an inherent difficulty in enterprise bargaining is the need to 'quantify' productivity. The challenge of defining the 'product' in teachers' work is well documented in the literature (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p.29; Dreeben, 1970, p.26; Johnson, 1990a, p.4; Lortie, 1975, p.136). Richard Simpson acknowledged this problem at a professional development day which focused on enterprise bargaining (Field notes, 24.4.95):

It is also conceivable that the collegial, caring culture of a school like Thornton may act to dampen the industrial consciousness of teachers. The risk of becoming industrially naive is that employers take advantage of the willingness of workers to give their all. Several teachers were aware of this possibility at Thornton and they warned of the dangers of becoming too comfortable in the school and forgetting the implications of the employee-employer dyad. Barbara explained:

I think in the case of a smaller school like this one, for example, I think you get people who get kind of carried away with being as committed as they feel, and it gets to a point where their industrial rights maybe are being violated. And I think they need some body to maybe kind of just watch that. Whether its possible for that to happen if you don't actually go and complain is a moot point. It probably shouldn't happen that Big Brother is going to come marching in the school and say you're working too long - go home. But I think sometimes it would be nice if that was a possibility. Barbara T2.9393

Teachers at Thornton may also be reluctant to pursue certain issues to the extent of calling on union involvement because of the closeness of associations between teachers and administrators in the school. In this scenario, a teacher's sense of what is right or fair may be overridden by the loyalty and respect in which they hold the administration team and school. Ted and Georgia were aware of this possibility in their comments about the role of the union:

There's a friendship there, you tend to rupture when you start to get toey...I think the admin often coasts on the idea that this is a collegial school, and everything is hunky dorey. I think they sometimes lose sight of the fact that there are people out here with concerns. Ted T42.272
There can be a bit of a problem there, because toes can get stepped on... At times I think we've been quite industrially naive about the way things happen and pay rates and conditions and things like that. And I think a lot of it's just taken for granted from teachers. I toyed with the idea of becoming more vocal, but I realise then that I've got a very good relationship with the admin, and I've got a very good relationship with most of - all of the staff. If I do become more vocal will that damage any of those relationships? Georgia T6.507

Teachers at Thornton saw that the union had two primary functions, both of protective nature. Firstly, that the union existed as a safety net to protect teachers from employers, and secondly to provide legal representation for members. Some teachers argued that the union had a minimal role at Thornton because the school climate was so positive. For these teachers the current collegial atmosphere and ability to negotiate directly with members of the senior administration team, subsumed any real need for a union, as the following comments indicate:

I would hope that the Thornton way of solving problems would prevent a conflict of interest developing to the stage where the emphasis was on the conflict rather than on the interest. I think that the world has a role for unions. I would hope that nearly all the time, the way we work at Thornton would mean that unions didn't have much of a role at Thornton, because it was not necessary, rather than any other reason. Paul A3.343

It might be a bigger deal if there were outrageous working conditions here but the working conditions are quite good and so the union sort of takes a back seat. Fred T22.461

In a school like this its role isn't really important I don't think. I can think of very few cases where a union would need to be involved. Just simply because the admin is so approachable. Hazel T36.510

Bob, Melissa and Carley acknowledged that the positive working environment currently existing at Thornton was in large part dependent upon the incumbent leadership, and were the existing administration to change, a greater need for the union may develop:

I think (the union) is certainly there in case - as a protector - in case the management team were to change, people need protecting. I think they need protecting legally. Bob T11.622

I think there's a need perhaps when the admin changes, and the culture of the school
There are a number of tensions that union involvement have instilled in the teacher-employer relationship; but there are also the benefits in regard to increases in autonomy, that teachers have derived from belonging to active unions. Grant (1988) summarises the ways in which teacher unions have facilitated teacher autonomy:

Unionization has increased teacher autonomy by protecting teachers against arbitrary dismissal and freeing them from the kind of rigid moral oversight that once forbade female teachers to marry and prescribed what they should wear and whether they could smoke in public. (p. 152)

He goes on to argue, however, that teacher unions have not managed to achieve the degree of autonomy for teachers enjoyed by doctors, lawyers or engineers, in their control over entry, licensing, promotion or tenure (p.152). For teachers and administrators at Thornton, the influence of the union continues to produce tensions and contradictions.

3. Occupational stakeholders

As discussed in chapter 1, there are two facets to occupational autonomy - individual and collective autonomy. This case study has focused on individual teacher autonomy, but I will briefly refer to two manifestations of collective autonomy for Queensland teachers - the Board of Teacher Registration and the Australian Teaching Council.

Collective autonomy is considered to be measured by the degree to which an occupational group can control entry to their occupation, and the development of and vision for that occupation. There is no national approach in Australia to the control of the occupation of teaching in terms of entry or misconduct, despite recommendations of the Ebbeck Report (1990) that “approval in principle be given to the establishment of a voluntary system of national teacher registration
through a body representative of State/Territory teacher registration agencies" (p.55). Only Queensland and South Australia have Boards of Teacher Registration, which have powers to control entry into teaching and maintain standards of conduct for registered teachers. In other states a range of authorities take on some of these responsibilities. In 1994 there were moves at a national level for the various boards to be abolished to facilitate the mutual recognition of teachers across Australia, but this was met by considerable resistance from Queensland and South Australia, and such a change has not eventuated.

Teachers in Queensland have had the opportunity to be registered since 1971 when the Board of Teacher Education (BTE) was created under amendments to the Education Act. Registration was then voluntary, but it is now compulsory for teachers in all Queensland schools to be registered. In a judgment in the Brisbane District Court hearing an appeal against a disciplinary decision of the BTE, Judge McGuire outlined its functions and ambit of responsibility:

The Board of Teacher Education has a responsible function to perform in the public interest. The Board is charged with setting and maintaining proper standards for entrance into the profession of teaching, and of setting and maintaining a high ethical code of conduct on the part of all those who profess to teach. (Muldoon, 1994, p.2)

In February 1989, the Board of Teacher Education was ‘reborn’ as the Board of Teacher Registration (BTR), which was established as a statutory body under the auspices of the Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988. This legislation prescribes that “no person shall employ as a teacher in any school a person who is not a registered teacher unless authorised to do so by the Board”. Thus, the BTR administers a statutory system of registration which applies to all government and non-government schools in Queensland. In October 1995 there were 68,987 teachers registered with the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (The Registered Teacher, October 1995, p.1).
Although the BTR is a statutory body, it was established with the intent of offering teachers in Queensland a degree of self-regulation of their occupation. Of the sixteen members of the BTR, a minimum of eight are to be registered teachers, and two members are to be nominees of the two teacher unions in Queensland. Three members of the BTR are elected by registered teachers in Queensland. The BTR sets minimum standards for entry to teaching as a registered teacher and has the power to caution, suspend or remove a teacher’s name from the Register where a teacher is found to be guilty of misconduct or incompetence. It also has the responsibility for assessing and approving qualifications from interstate and overseas.

The minimum requirement for registration as a teacher in Queensland is currently three years of teacher education, although two reviews of teacher education in the late seventies and early eighties, advocated the establishment of a four year minimum (Bassett, *Review: Teacher Education in Queensland, 1978* and Auchmuty, *Report of the National Inquiry into Teacher Education, 1980*). As of early 1996, the BTR had not been successful in gaining state government endorsement for this change to the registration requirements, but was strongly advocating that all graduating teachers complete at least four years of preservice teacher education by the end of the decade (Muldoon, 1994, p.2).

Since its inception the BTR has also developed guidelines and procedures for the acceptance of programs of teacher education for registration purposes in Queensland; reviewed in service teacher education needs; and commissioned a number of collaborative reviews on the implications for teacher education of developments in areas including literacy and language education, Asian studies, main streaming and inclusive education.
The BTR's direct influence on the work of teachers at Thornton is minimal. Each year teachers receive a reminder from the BTR for payment of a nominal amount of money for continuing registration; and receive occasional publications. Beyond that teachers at Thornton would be unlikely to have any contact with the BTR. It exists as a gatekeeper to the occupation in terms of controlling entry to teaching and has the power to discipline teachers. It has, therefore, a significant role to play in maintaining collective autonomy for teachers, but its sphere of influence does not extend beyond that to the autonomy teachers experience in their daily work.

The second manifestation of collective autonomy for Queensland teachers is the Australian Teaching Council (ATC). In the past decade, there has been considerable agitation within the education community in Australia to form a national organisation for teachers, which would perform similar functions to other professional bodies such as the Australian Medical Association or the Queensland Law Society, that is, as a gatekeeper for the profession. In 1991, the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) was instigated to run for three years, after protracted negotiations between the Commonwealth government, all state and territory employing authorities, non-government employing authorities, the teacher unions and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Three working parties were formed under the umbrella of this project, to consider key national issues relating to the quality of teaching and learning in Australian schools. These groups focused on teachers' work organisation and related pedagogical issues; teachers' professional preparation and career development; and national professional issues. In its early deliberations, the Working Party on National Professional Issues included a proposal for the establishment of a national teaching council. As a result of further consultation at a conference jointly convened with the National Board for Employment, Education and Training
in March 1992, there was an endorsement of the development of a national professional body for teachers. As a result of this recommendation, the Australian Teaching Council was founded in 1993.

The ATC was established as a collaborative partnership of a broad range of participants in the education industry. It received an initial establishment grant from the federal government, but was ultimately intended to operate on the basis of members’ subscriptions ($20 in 1995). Its stated purpose is to aim to help teachers “sustain and extend respect, recognition and status for their profession” (ATC Strategic Plan, 1995). After carrying out an extensive qualitative research project to explore the views of Australian teachers in relation to their work, the ATC developed a strategic plan which arrived at five priority areas for action in the 1994-1997 triennium:

- Promoting the work of teachers by explaining the value of teaching and teachers’ skills and providing the profession with a stronger, more unified voice to influence debates affecting the development of education and teaching and learning in Australia.
- Improving the accessibility, standards and quality of professional development for teachers.
- Ensuring the teaching profession exercises its responsibility to establish standards to determine who enters the profession and what skills, values and qualities should be reflected in teacher performance.
- Promoting the ATC to ensure that its profile, image and message is known amongst teachers and the community.
- Developing the management and infrastructure of the ATC to ensure that its operations are effective and efficient. (Australian Teaching Council Membership pamphlet, 1995)

The Council has acted in an advocacy capacity at a national level, which has included arguing for the establishment of a national teacher registration framework and promotion of the UNESCO initiative - International Teachers’ Day (5 October). It has also joined with the National Schools Network (NSN) to hold a number of professional development opportunities for teachers in the form of National Development Schools.
Despite this attempt to create and sustain a national professional teaching organisation a viable organisation does not yet exist. Funding cuts announced after the change of federal government in March 1996 may bring about the demise of the ATC. Underlying the failure of this effort to sustain a high profile organisation to represent teachers nationally in Australia, is the reality that they have not had broad-based support from teachers themselves. Few teachers at Thornton had heard of the Australian Teaching Council. Few teachers at Thornton saw a need for a national professional organisation, because they believed that the BTR or teacher unions were fulfilling or should fulfil many of the functions that such an organisation would perform. The influence which such a national organisation may wield over teachers and their individual autonomy in their work is still, therefore, yet to be realised.

Chapter summary
Three sources of external stakeholder influence were identified in this chapter - the BSSSS, QATIS, and two organisations with the capacity and potential to influence the collective autonomy of teachers. The BSSSS was found to exercise considerable influence upon individual teacher autonomy, but teachers at Thornton perceived that this influence was either inevitable and justified, or that their level of influence through the Board’s representative processes in some way compensated for the BSSSS’s influence, or deemed it acceptable. The impact of the union on individual teacher autonomy was shown to be overt in its capacity to negotiate for improvements in teachers’ working conditions, and subtle, in the way union politics influenced relationships in the school. The Board of Teacher Registration and the Australian Teaching Council were discussed briefly as examples of organisations with the capacity to influence teachers’ experience of collective autonomy as an occupational group.
CHAPTER SEVEN  STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES

This chapter examines a number of structural influences upon teacher autonomy which emerged from interviews and observations at Thornton. Two of these influences arise out of the broader social, political and economic climate in Queensland, namely community perceptions of teachers and market forces. The other influences are most appropriately characterised as structures relating to the school - the size of the school, lack of time, and the level of bureaucracy at the school.

1. Community perceptions of teachers

Thornton's teachers do not live and work in a vacuum. The broader social and political climate in Queensland and Australia, clearly influences the way in which teachers' perceive their experience of individual autonomy in their work. One illustration of such potential influence can be seen in the rise of the 'new right'. It is generally acknowledged that most mainstream parties in the western world have moved to the 'right' (although I acknowledge the warning of Lingard et al (1993, p.9) that the new right is not “monolithic” and its manifestations vary from country to country). Such a move has taken place in Australia, as is reflected in the acceptance by successive Labor governments at federal and state level of policies such as economic rationalism, which are most aptly characterised as conservative. This shift in the positioning of mainstream politics has been enacted in part in response to perceived voter attitudes. If community beliefs and values have moved to the 'right', one likely consequence of such a shift is that attitudes to social policy areas such as education, and the policy making in such areas, will also become increasingly conservative, and will manifest the restrictions on personal and occupational freedoms that such an agenda requires (see Apple, 1989; Arnot, 1992; Ball, 1990; Lingard et al, 1993). In education
these attitudes are likely to be evidenced in demands for greater accountability from teachers and schools, and consequent calls to limit individual teacher autonomy.

In Queensland, this scenario is even more likely, because it is a state which is renowned for its 'conservatism'. The state was ruled by a conservative government for almost a quarter of a century until the early nineties, and a conservative coalition government was returned to power in early 1996, after six years of a Labor government. During the earlier conservative rule, the Queensland government became infamous for its infringements of civil liberties, and resistance and opposition to reforms in areas such as abortion, prostitution, equal employment opportunity, and education. Teachers and schools in Queensland are therefore framed by this political and social backdrop of conservatism. The individual autonomy experienced by teachers at Thornton College is also influenced by this broader backdrop of conservative community attitudes and values, particularly in terms of community perceptions of teachers and their work.

Teachers have generally received a 'savaging' in the popular press in Australia in recent years. Debate in the community about the role of teachers has been regularly sparked by, and reflected in, newspaper headlines such as: "Parent group fears teacher standard drop" (The Courier Mail, 15 August, 1994); "Pay rise OK, but all that vacation?" (The Australian, 2 December, 1994); "The HSC timebomb - a bad teacher" (Sydney Morning Herald, 14 February, 1995); "Crisis in the classroom" (The Bulletin, 14 February, 1995); "For a better society, first teach teachers" (The Courier Mail, 11 October, 1996). The inflammatory nature of these articles has generated increased community debate about teaching as an occupation, and all too frequently, encouraged what can only be described as 'teacher-bashing' in a range of forums. Embedded in the public
debate are calls for greater accountability from teachers, increased regulation of teaching as an occupation, and more external control over school curricula.

This level of public awareness and interest clearly has some impact on the teachers at Thornton. A number of teachers at Thornton spoke of their perception that teaching had a negative image in the community, including the following:

_We have a very low status._ Rosemary T18.218

_We've lost the kudos of a professional in the community. I mean in the old days - the teacher, the priest and the doctor were right up there in the community. We are quite poorly received generally by the community._ Carley T40.440

_You know, I've heard people complaining at my hairdressers - they start talking about teachers - "They don't give you any time like they used to, they never stay back after school, they'll never see the students at lunch time." And you think, these aren't the teachers that I know. Where are they getting these stories from? We don't seem to have a very high reputation amongst the community._ Mary T8.516

It would seem, however, that the high level of respect for teachers within the Thornton community does much to diminish the negative impact of opinions about teachers in the broader community. At Thornton, other factors such as supportive leadership, parental support and collegial structures, generally compound to facilitate teacher autonomy rather than detract from it. Whilst these conditions prevail at Thornton, teachers will be in a sense insulated from broader community perceptions. In another school, however, strong community perceptions about the need for more centralised control over teachers could result in the diminished experience of individual autonomy by teachers.
2. Market forces

As an independent school, Thornton is dependent on continued support from parents to ensure its survival. The pressure of catering to the perceived ‘market’, and the values and beliefs of the group comprised in that segment of the community, has become manifest in a number of recent decisions made by the administration. I would argue that these decisions have compromised the school’s foundational philosophies to a limited degree, and subsequently have reduced the level of autonomy enjoyed by teachers in terms of their capacity to influence decision-making in the school.

Connell et al (1982) observe that the “the ruling class and its schools are articulated mainly through a market, while the working class and its schools are articulated mainly through a bureaucracy” (p.133). In this sense the market has the power to influence policy and practice in the school, and act as an inhibitor on teachers and administrators in their working lives. I was reminded of the significance of the market, by the assertion by several teachers that ‘Thornton is a business’:

...it is run as a business, you’ve got to preserve the good name...the perceptions of being a good school in the community...A school is not viable if it’s not run as a business. Alison S2.178

It’s a financial venture - it’s non-profit - but it’s still a financial venture. Chris T15.471

It’s a serious business. Multi-million dollar business. Ted T42.284

The school’s identity and aspirations as a business enterprise produce an ethos which is not necessarily attune to the educational philosophies celebrated by the school.

Were Thornton another independent school in Brisbane, without such a clear set of foundational
and operating principles, the instances of ‘market compromise’ would be less obvious and perhaps to be anticipated. But Thornton was founded as an alternative to the traditional Greater Public Schools in Brisbane, aspiring to capture and cater for a clientele with slightly different expectations and assumptions about independent schooling. As noted by Bob, the school has to be sold to a *niche market* and...the philosophy dictates the clientele (T11.214). In a few instances, which I will discuss, it can be argued that the administrators and School Council have allowed their impressions of community values and expectations to determine their responses to issues in the school in the face of opposition from some teachers. To this extent, they have ‘sold out’ to their perceptions of the demands of the market.

One of the instances of bowing to market forces is the school’s policy on school uniforms. Unlike most other independent schools which generally have one uniform for all students, Thornton students have a choice of four styles, in different colour configurations of blue, red and white. Despite championing individual choice as a central precept in the school, school uniforms are still prescribed, although admittedly with more choice available to students than at other independent schools. Why didn’t Thornton go all the way in establishing a school with no uniforms for students? The answer lies in the shadow of market forces, as the founders perceived that parents who send their children to independent schools want them to wear uniforms. Uniforms are the ‘face’ of the school, and as argued by Symes (1996), “where schools are competing for students, appearance has become a benchmark of the well-run and managed school” (p.1). By providing students with some choices in a prescribed uniform, the Thornton founders settled for a ‘middle ground’ that may convince students that they had some choice, but also satisfies parents, who believe that tidy, uniform bodies represent effective schooling.
A similar concession to perceived community standards emerged in the passionate debate over grooming policy for boys and girls in the school, which was discussed in chapter 5.1(i). That section explored some of the challenges the school has faced in reconciling expressed philosophical concern for gender equity with the perceived social norms extolled in the community. Another example of a concessionary response occurred early in 1995, when a student from a state secondary school north of Brisbane was reportedly suspended for wearing a nose stud to school. Brisbane’s major newspaper polled principals of private schools in the days after this incident, and reported that those surveyed had been unanimous in their response that students with nose studs or nose rings would not be allowed at their schools. Richard Simpson was quoted in the article as saying “that students are ambassadors of the school” and “if they did wear them, we’d ask them to take them out” (The Courier-Mail, 1995, p.1). Clearly, in Richard’s mind, students with nose studs would be sending a message to the community which would be received unfavourably. A school newsletter made this point in highlighting the differences between public expectations of independent and state schools:

Public - including parent - expectations of private schools are different from their expectations of government schools in relation to presentation and grooming. (School Newsletter, 1995, p.4)

The Thornton response in these incidents was to perceived community and market expectations. I am not aware that these expectations were tested in any way to see whether parents would be prepared to accept certain policies or practices which may not be the norm at other independent schools. Perhaps anecdotal evidence or unsolicited parent feedback have sustained a particular position on issues such as grooming and uniforms. Comments such as one made by a staff member who was going to send her children to an independent school would certainly support the school’s stance:
Yet the positive response of parents to innovations such as outdoor education, an absence of competitive sport and a number of features of the Thornton way would tend to suggest that there is a space in the market for an independent school with a more radical agenda. In addition, I wonder whether community values in late twentieth century Australia are quite as conservative in regards to dress as a school such as Thornton perceives. The increasing casualisation of dress in much of western society, particularly Queensland, and the acceptance of “sartorial extremism” (Symes, 1996, p.2) by the community, suggest that schools may be lagging behind community values in the insistence on the wearing of uniforms and the maintenance of particular norms of body presentation and adornment.

There was a range of reactions to these incidents from teachers at Thornton, from strong support for the administrators’ decision to vehement disagreement. Teachers supporting a less conservative perspective on uniforms or grooming were faced with the competing personal views of other teachers and administrators and the reality of Thornton’s status as an independent school. The pressure of the perceived views of the Thornton ‘market’ on certain issues, has ultimately proved more persuasive to the administration team than the views of some teachers. The level of autonomy enjoyed by these teachers in terms of their capacity to influence decision-making in the school has consequently been reduced.

It is interesting to note that all of the situations cited relate to students’ behaviour. Thornton’s administrators have been prepared to make concessions to perceived parental and community expectations in relation to students, yet they appear to be firmer in their resolve to fulfil their
commitment to individual choice where teachers are concerned. For example, the open although
discrete acceptance of homosexual members of staff would not necessarily be condoned by other
independent schools in Brisbane. The evidence suggests that were parents to complain about the
presence of gay or lesbian members of staff, the administrators would stand by the teachers and
present parents with the option of removing their children.

Thornton’s administrators may withstand pressure from parents or from a sense of community
values in regards to teachers’ lifestyle issues, but it is clear that the market influences the way the
school operates. There are teachers on staff at Thornton who strongly opposed the decision to
impose hair regulations on the boys and not the girls. There are teachers who would support the
demise of the school uniform at the school. As a teachers’ school, teachers framed Thornton’s
constitution and evolution. Yet, there are external forces which are apparently stronger than their
educational and philosophical convictions, and these have forged particular decisions. The market
is arguably one of the most powerful of these.

3. School size
Thornton is a relatively small school. In 1995, there was a staff of 57 and a student body of
approximately 530. The size of the staff has a significant impact on the staff culture, particularly
on teachers’ perceptions that they have a voice in the decision-making processes of the school,
and that they have some control over the sort of educational community which Thornton is and
will become.

In her study of schools of between 1200 to 3200 students, Siskin (1994) found that it was
impossible for teachers in such large schools to maintain relationships with their colleagues. The teachers in such schools:

...report repeatedly that there are too many teachers, too much space, and too little time for them to know other teachers by name, let alone to develop a sense of ‘living together in the school’ or sharing a common enterprise. (Siskin, 1994, p.72)

With only around 50 staff at Thornton, every teacher is acquainted with every other member of staff. Fred felt that the sense of community developed because there were not so many staff that you couldn’t know everyone’s name:

All the staff know each other. I mean, you’ve probably known schools where you see a teacher on playground duty - who is that? And that’s embarrassing isn’t it. You couldn’t say that about here. You’ve only been in the school a week or so but you’d know a lot of faces and a lot of names. All you have to do is come here [the staff common room] and you see just about everybody within a couple of hours. T22.183

The founders of Thornton planned for the school to grow to its current size - approximately 530 students (although there were Commonwealth government restrictions on size that influenced this decision, as discussed in chapter 3.1). They had a clear vision of the impact of size on a school culture, much of it gleaned from their experience in other large independent schools. To Richard Simpson one of the negatives about his previous school had been its size:

...it was so big...I felt you just couldn’t get a community ethos, and it occurred to me and Bob and Paul that that’s something that schools need to have. They’ve become families, their own communities. A2.203

Paul Browning outlined the philosophy the founders had in mind:

...we wanted the school to be small. Our original concept was a school of this size, and I think everybody in the wider school community recognises that we are so stuck on this size, that nobody seriously suggests that we ought to increase the size, because we just say we’re stuck on this size. A3.37

The only potential threat to maintaining the school at its current size is financial considerations. Paul Browning acknowledged that the School Council had recently looked at the financial
benefits which may accrue from increasing student numbers. He argued that the constraints of the school grounds and buildings meant that a sizable increase would be very difficult to manage. The school had been planned with the current size as the goal, in the knowledge (or hope) that a reasonable economy of scale could still be achieved with that number.

The size of the school has had a significant impact upon teachers' ability to work autonomously. In many subjects there is only one teacher teaching in the area throughout the school. A decision was made at some point not to adopt the departmental or faculty approach which has grown in popularity in Queensland schools over the last decade. In such structures, a department will incorporate a range of subjects, with the Head of Department unlikely to be teaching in more than a couple of the subjects in her or his department. At Thornton, there is a plethora of subject co-ordinators, with some 22 people out of a teaching staff of 43 with such responsibilities. I was quite surprised when I attended a co-ordinators' meeting because it was such a large group (Field notes, 6.3.95). The very fact that so many teachers have primary curriculum responsibilities for their subject area gives them more autonomy than if they were working under a subject co-ordinator. They have control over their subject budget, which as discussed in chapter 4.1(iv) was one of the ways Thornton's teachers understood autonomy in their work. They also have the opportunity to steer or lead curriculum development or professional development in their subject area. Participation in subject co-ordinator meetings gives some teachers access to another level of the decision-making process.

The potential for being autonomous is also a construct of the ethos of individuality which is cultivated at Thornton, and this is clearly linked to the small size of the school. Hugh values this
aspect of working at Thornton:

_I enjoy the size of the school - that it's not an enormous school. That you can reach people, you don't lose touch with members of staff, even though you might not talk to every staff member, you get to see every member of staff and ancillary staff, whoever are in the building, you can keep in touch with them at some stage of the week, and that's really important._ T17.258

It is difficult to function effectively as part of an organisation, if all sense of individuality is lost in the crowd. Admittedly, it may be possible to develop a strong sense of operating independently in a large organisation, but your contribution to the whole is more likely to be marginalised and less likely to be valued by the community in which you work.

There is a bubbling tension in the school emanating from a fear that the growth in numbers, even to the size originally planned, has had a serious impact on preferred management and communication styles within the school. The senior administration team is well aware of this. Paul Browning spoke of his commitment to structures such as collegial groups and teachers' meetings as ways of maintaining a degree of intimacy and connection that may be otherwise subverted by the growth in the size of the school:

_The sheer weight of numbers makes it harder and it makes communication more difficult, so when there were only 12 of us on staff we could all sort of get together and chat pretty easily._ A3.389

As the tension between educational ideals and financial realities becomes more tightly drawn, the school will face a plausible pressure to increase student numbers. The impact of an increase in student and staff numbers should be measured, however, in more than financial outcomes. There is a level of teacher satisfaction derived from a more intimate school environment, including opportunities to promote a teacher's sense and experience of autonomous work.
4. Time

An earlier chapter raised the concern expressed by some Thornton teachers, that active engagement in decision-making processes in the school takes an extraordinary amount of time (see chapter 4.3). Time is a well-documented dimension of the work of teachers in schools (Boyer, 1983, p.230; Goodlad, 1984, p.96; Grumet, 1988, p.86; Jackson, 1990, p.168; Monahan, 1993, p.8; Sizer, 1985, p.79) and one of the most potentially pervasive constraints on individual teacher autonomy. Denscombe (1982) writes of time in schools as “another resource which, as in most organisations, is a scarce commodity” (p.256). He argues that:

Teachers’ activity in classrooms needs to take into account the time-span of the lesson, the frequency of meetings and the duration of the course - each of which provides a practical constraint on the approach to the job which affects virtually all situations... the influence of the time-table continues to have a characteristically pervasive effect on teachers’ perceptions of their job. (p.256)

In Bransgrove’s (1991) study of teachers in two Melbourne schools, it was reported that of a range of potential variables in teacher stress, “insufficient time to fit activities into the day” was nominated as a major perceived stressor by teachers in one suburban school (p.28). Little (1982) identifies lack of time as one of the influences on successful professional development in schools. Time in such work situations is a “valued, coveted, even disputed form of currency” (p.333). Hargreaves (1994) argues that:

Time is the enemy of freedom. Or so it seems to teachers. Time presses down the fulfilment of their wishes. It pushes against the realization of their wants. Time compounds the problem of innovation and confounds the implementation of change. It is central to the formation of teachers’ work. (p.95)

He develops an argument for perceiving time as a subjective quality, which is measured and valued in different ways by teachers and administrators in schools.
Where time is at a premium, the logical coping strategy is to prioritise activities, so that the most important or valuable tasks are completed first. For most teachers, the prioritised activities seem to be those connected directly with their teaching - preparation, marking, and helping individual students, all of which fall within the first level of teacher autonomy, work in classrooms. In a study of Canadian elementary school teachers, Hargreaves (1994) notes that the teachers exhibited a strong sense that "classroom work forms the heart of teaching, as it is usually understood. Relatively speaking, all other activities are peripheral or supplementary by comparison" (p.99). It is easy to see how teacher involvement in structures which facilitate teacher voice, such as collegial groups or committees, could be relegated to a relatively low priority.

But devotion to classroom preparation also requires sufficient time in order to develop curriculum materials and prepare tailor-made resources for classes. Where teachers are pushed by demands from parents, students, committee participation and extra-curricula activities, to name but a few, it is much easier to resort to pre-packaged materials, last year's lesson plans, and the contributions of colleagues. As Apple (1986) argues, "instead of teachers having the time and skill to do their own curriculum planning and deliberation, they become isolated executors of someone else's plans, procedures, and evaluative mechanisms" (p.162). Where there is sufficient time for the teacher to prepare for teaching, his or her autonomy in the domain of the classroom will be promoted.

As identified earlier, time certainly emerged as a constant focus of complaint among Thornton's teachers and administrators. There was a strong feeling that there was not enough time to achieve
what they wanted to do, and that they suffered because of that:

...in many ways, time is probably a scarcer resource than money. Paul A3.511

...the biggest thing you lack in a school is time... Time is just such an enemy in schools. Vivian T34.91 & 564

Time is a real problem. Marie T37.247

The lack of time was perceived by some teachers to be due to the school’s very high expectations of staff, with the result that many teachers felt that they had overcommitted themselves:

I feel, we all feel, that we do too many hours. That too much is expected of us...We never feel that we can just wing it...whereas I think, in other schools perhaps you don’t feel that pressure. Amy T12.591

The levels of commitment sometimes can be very draining...I mean - this week for example, I had a Year 8 parent night, Information night Tuesday night, Interview day all Saturday, and then I’ve got marking that must be done Sunday, and I’ve got another parent night Tuesday - it just spirals out of control. So you just sort of give up your own life at certain times of the year. Ben T20.460

I think we have expectations... we probably wouldn’t be expecting anything more than any other private school. But it’s in a different way. Adele A1.747

The reification of ‘the school’ in these responses could be interpreted to indicate pressure or expectations from the administration team, but when I probed for some clarification of where such expectations were coming from, most teachers admitted that the expectation was internalised, rather than externally imposed. Internal drive and determination are not unusual qualities to find in teachers. Hargreaves (1994) monitored a similar intensity of an internalised work ethic among the elementary school teachers in his Canadian study. He observes that:

Many of the demands and expectations of teaching seem to come from within teachers themselves, and frequently teachers appeared to drive themselves with almost merciless enthusiasm and commitment in an attempt to meet the virtually unattainable standards of pedagogical perfection that they set themselves. They did not appear to need direction or pressure from above to motivate them in their quest. They drove themselves quite hard enough. (p.126)
Teachers at Thornton chose to commit themselves to a heightened pace and intensity of work, but their responses indicate that the make-up and sources of that interior commitment are complex and closely connected to the culture of the school:

*I suppose to a large extent it's coming from within ourselves. I certainly know that I am one of my harshest critics... There must be some other pressure as well. Maybe it's expectations. You know, you are trying to live up to other people's expectations as well. The expectations are that if you're a teacher here, you're going to be a really good teacher.* Amy T12.601

...it's not guilt imposed, there is no attempt to make you feel here that you should do things, it comes from within...I think you can get very stressed here, but again that's self imposed stress that's the problem. Not knowing when to say no. Not knowing how much you can tackle and still have a chance for, life for yourself...It's internal pressure is my guess. Melissa T7.199 & 224

*I think probably the pressure comes from within yourself, rather than from outside. I think that you know that there are a lot of jobs to be done, and you try to share them among you as much as you can.* Milly T33.121

*Overworked sort of implies that somebody else is doing it to them - the overwork comes from being treated with so much respect that you tend to give everything.* Chris T15.364

Tess felt that the school did not ask too much of its teachers, and that the commitment of teachers came from within. She drew a fine distinction between it being assumed that teachers take part in outdoor education camps, interview days etc., and being expected to be there:

*It's never mentioned, but it's assumed that you'll be there. But it's not expected, there's a difference there. And if you for some reason can't be there, then that's fine.* T1.716

A similar semantical distinction was made by Janice in relation to staff involvement in the school, but with quite a different conclusion. Whereas Tess saw the expectation as providing the individual with the ultimate choice in the level of commitment, Janice felt it was unfairly onerous:

*I don't think we are asked - I think we are expected, that's the difference.* T42.276

The power of the expectations and resulting commitment was described by Georgia as a vortex:

*You get sucked in. It's like a vortex, I think that's the best way to describe it...You just get taken up with the enthusiasm, everyone wants to help each other, and everyone is willing*
to help each other. T6.111

These responses point to the strength of the cultural norms permeating the school. A commitment to working hard, and being involved is clearly one facet of the Thornton way of doing things.

Responses from support staff, administrators and teachers contributed to the conclusion that most teachers work hard at Thornton and that the manifest outcome of such commitment is a culture of busyness and constant movement in the school. A number of support staff made comments about the teachers which focused on their work ethic, including the following:

*They work hard. They do work hard, and they put in a lot of hours apart from 9 to 3... and then the put in extra hours as well...I know the frenzy that this place gets in.* Gwen S1.235

*I think the staff here work very hard. They put a lot of hours in.* Jane S7.314

Most teachers believed that they and their colleagues worked hard at Thornton, although some were prepared to admit that there were some who ‘gave less than others’:

*...it’s incredibly intense. And I think very, very underrated. I think they just work so hard.* James T24.515

*We work bloody hard...I mean we all work hard.* Carley T40.179

*It’s a lot of hard work... People are working awfully hard.* Ted T42.84 & 384

Such responses paint a rather different picture to the nine to three teacher, rehashing lessons from their first year of teaching, sitting in the staff room reading the paper or playing cards.

A lack of time is a powerful determinant of teacher autonomy where autonomy is understood as both a sense of control over work and a voice in decision-making in a school. The way in which teachers involve themselves in the consultative and collegial processes in schools will hinge on the time they have available. Consultation takes time. Adele Mathews spoke at length about the time
which consultation with students can take, but her reservations are equally applicable to the consultative process among staff members: 

_I realise because of our philosophy then that’s one of the struggles that we’re going to have...If we had a dictatorial type of establishment, then, there is no sitting down and taking a half hour with a student and half an hour a parent, saying - look, we think that your hair is extreme. Look the rule is five centimetres above the collar, tapered must be able to be parted - whomph, out you go. No questions. But the fact that our guidelines are allowing room for negotiation, for individuality of things, makes it time consuming...So that’s the other side of the negotiation work as an administrator, it’s very exhausting and consuming. A1.711_

Building and sustaining collegial structures takes time. Despite its importance to the greater educational project, strengthening collegiality is a commitment which is often cast aside in favour of other activities. This connection between lack of time and teacher autonomy has been recognised in a number of recent studies. Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) call for a review of the working day of teachers because teachers do not have enough time for professional development in the current school regime. They argue that “connected to pupil control and teacher autonomy is the matter of time as a highly valued resource. Because of the large numbers of students and activities that teachers have to handle by themselves, they seldom have enough time to accomplish their goals” (p.18). They maintain that time priorities in schools need to be reevaluated so that professional development and collegial processes are not left out of the teacher’s working life:

...we give the highest priority to the reexamination of the authority, autonomy and workday of teachers as linchpins for the others. As a starting point, teachers, as a group, have to possess the authority and autonomy to shape the decisions that affect them, and they need time to determine how to make the process of teaching and learning more meaningful not only in their own classrooms but in their schools as a whole. They need time to plan; time to teach; time to reflect on their teaching; time to consult with others. In sum, teachers as a collective need the opportunity and time to work and grow as professionals. (p.261)

Johnson’s (1990a) conclusions support the veracity of a direct connection between lack of time and reduced collegial interaction:
By far the most frequent explanation teachers offered for scarce collegial interactions was inadequate time. It appeared, however, that even if more time were available, teachers might not use it for more meetings with their peers; students always need more help; professional caution and competition seep in. Business and industry put discussion and decision-making at the center of their enterprises and allocate vast resources to ensure that work is coordinated, but the educational workplace requires that teachers continuously deliver service during all but a small portion of their time, necessarily pushing collegial interactions to the margins of the workday - before and after school, while supervising recess or eating a hurried lunch. (p.172)

Powell, Farrar and Cohen (1985) argue that the forging of a shared educational mission will not occur without a commitment that includes an awareness that time is needed for its development. They observe that “a sense of colleagueship, built around instruction, is indispensable for the creation of common educational purpose. Teachers need time for it, especially when fragmenting forces, such as departmental specialization, discourage it”(p.320).

A clear connection between time and involvement in the decision-making processes and structures of the school emerged at Thornton. Vivian, Marie, Ross and Carley highlight the reality that one of the first things to suffer under constraints of time is productive team work and collaboration, as teachers prioritise their involvements at school:

...you're lucky to find time at times to meet with the people you are actually working closely with. Vivian T34.91

I think that what happens [with collegial groups] is that people get snowed under - and I missed the last one. Marie T37.244

I think the other thing is that [School Council] is on top of your load - it is really time consuming...I just don't think people have got the time. Ross T32.272

I think that in many cases, they are so darned busy anyway that they're doing heaps of other things and this [the School Council] is just one more thing that isn't necessary for them to be involved in. They don't see it as having a direct link with what they're doing. Carley T40.36

The time necessary to drive a consultative model of organisation is well recognised by Paul
Browning. He spoke of this in relation to the time devoted to developing a model of teacher appraisal at the school:

_One of the things that we have found time and again in working through such a process, is that it is very slow and time consuming in the early stages with the consultative model. Particularly getting people's ideas and getting agreement and support and then sharing some other ideas and working on through implementation processes and so on. It's very slow and tedious, and can be very frustrating in the early stages._ A3.317

Time is not a structural force beyond the direction or control of individual teachers. Some teachers at Thornton have taken steps to control the pressures imposed by lack of time, by reducing their workload and commitment to the school. They have consciously pulled back from some duties which they saw as additional to their core business of classroom teaching:

_I think if you were a conscientious person it is easy to say yes more often than you really ought to. I think that I've been through quite a time here, where I just decided for a year or two, that I wasn't going to say yes to anything, I was going to say - this is my time, I need to get on with some things to do with my teaching, and I'm not going to do the extras basically._ Julian T 13.255

_And I just looked at it and I thought, no I can't do it. And for once, I actually did say no. And I didn't feel too bad about it._ Melissa T 7.258

Other teachers found it difficult to limit their commitment to the school because of the pervasiveness of the 'culture of involvement':

_And it gets hard at times, and this is one thing that I've had to develop - I think it is hard to say no. To work out for yourself, this is my time - I can't let this impinge on my personal relationships and time outside of school. So it gets a bit hard like that, but I think it's because everyone's keen and...we all have a stake in this._ Georgia T 6.123

...every year somebody says to me - will you do so and so - and I say no, and then I think about it, then go back and say yes, because I think, how can I say that...I think it is because the whole school is busy, and the admin is so nice. If you're not doing something, and you're naturally prone to do a fair amount, you feel perhaps you're not contributing._ Melissa T 7.186

These teachers have consciously attempted to control their input to the school. But the question arises whether lack of time and busyness at the school have become so stressful as to be harmful
to teachers. I asked teachers whether they felt stressed and their responses indicated that there were particular times of the school year which were very stressful. They agreed that the nature of their commitment to Thornton and their students meant that they worked hard, but most of them dismissed suggestions that their level of stress may be harmful. Melissa’s observation reflects the gist of the comments:

*I think I’ve probably worked harder in my life at this school...I think I’ve probably been under more stress since my life in this school. But it’s a different sort of stress, not nasty and unpleasant, it’s - can I get everything done in time.* T7.1460

The need to be involved in Thornton’s well-developed network of committees was identified by some teachers as a considerable time pressure (see chapter 4.3(iv)). In contrast, Bransgrove (1991) found in her research that teachers in her sample were not particularly troubled by “insufficient time through having too many committees” (p.28). The style of school organisation is, of course, going to determine the nature of such a response, as the involvement of teachers at a school without an extensive committee structure are unlikely to be as affected by committees, as teachers at a school like Thornton. Somewhat paradoxically, however, Melissa shared the point that stress may be reduced and time freed up through committee structures. She argued that the committee structure at Thornton acted as a facilitator of delegation, as the load was shared across several teachers rather than being taken on by one individual (T7.268). The concept of sharing the load was implicitly supported by Barbara in her comment about the level of commitment of staff at the school:

*I think it’s the fact that so many people do it. It’s not exactly a demand, it’s kind of more subtle than that. There is an expectation that everybody’s going to kind of be the same in their level of commitment. Because if you don’t do it, then somebody else is going to have to work harder.* Barbara T2.624

The potential for effective sharing through committee structures is largely dependent upon an
equal distribution of involvement by staff in such work. As was discussed in chapter 4.3(iv), there is a tendency in most organisations for a few people to shoulder most of the responsibilities and hard work, and there was some evidence of this occurring at Thornton.

Lack of time therefore emerges as a constant influence upon the working lives of teachers at Thornton, and as a considerable inhibitor to the building of a workplace which facilitates teacher autonomy.

5. Bureaucracy

The existence of too much bureaucracy is painted by many researchers as one of the major impediments to teacher autonomy. Johnson (1990a) found that “teachers in all schools clearly believed that highly bureaucratic schools, whether in the public or private sector, made poor use of them as professionals. Their special interests were neutralized; they were expected to comply rather than invent” (p.144). In her portrait of John F. Kennedy High School in New York, Lightfoot (1983) describes the negative effect of the state and city educational bureaucracies on teachers in the school:

Throughout my visit I was often struck by the tension between the particularistic goals, style and decision-making of Kennedy inhabitants; and the universal edicts of the state and city educational bureaucracies. These external bodies impose constraints on procedures and products that shape the everyday life of teachers and students at Kennedy...most people I spoke to viewed the bureaucratic layers encompassing Kennedy as potentially deadening to the creativity and productivity of their school. (p.111)

Goodlad (1984, p.41) argued that bureaucracy was inevitable as educational systems grew, but such an inevitability could surely be controlled so that the bureaucracy does not impair a teacher’s ability to provide effective educational opportunities for students, and derive a sense of satisfaction from their work.
In Queensland, a project exploring the image of the teaching profession co-ordinated by Frank Crowther (1991) found that devolution of decision-making was going some way to dismantling the “historical bureaucratic restrictions upon schools” (p.16) and was strongly supported by teachers. This trend was supported in one of the early pronouncements of the current Education Minister in Queensland, Bob Quinn. A newspaper reported him as saying in a speech to an Education Department conference in March 1996, that the “bureaucratic impost on teachers in classrooms” needed to be reduced. He went on to say that it was time “to look back on those processes that have gone on in the past and try to cut back...to allow teachers to get on with their core task, which is teaching kids” (Bartsch, 1996).

Thornton presents a specific context for teachers as a school operating with a minimum of bureaucracy surrounding its everyday operations. This lack of bureaucracy appears to create a productive and comfortable working environment for teachers. The term ‘bureaucracy’ was frequently mentioned in interviews, particularly in relation to issues about autonomy for the teacher. Many of the teachers with previous experience in state high schools made comparisons between Thornton and state schools. The pressure on an individual state school and its teachers from a bureaucracy which governs their operations, would appear to be pervasive and formidable. Max felt that Thornton was more ‘relaxed’ than his previous state school. When I probed to discover what made Thornton more relaxed, he painted a picture of a pervasive circle of influence, with significant implications for the experience of any individual teacher:

*I think it’s the fact that, with state schools, they have a Department agenda that you’ve got to fulfil. Yes, that affects everybody. It affects the principal, and the principal affects the subject masters, because they’ve got to be seen to be accountable and whilst this school is accountable obviously to the School Council, there’s no bureaucratic agenda that’s thrust upon them to have to fulfil. T16.79*
Max gave an example of the way the bureaucratic agenda imposes itself upon schools. State schools are told, he explained, to show how they are being socially just with what he described as a degree of coercion, but at Thornton it may be agreed that social justice was a key goal, but it was not “enforced” upon staff. The Thornton way sustained him in such a way that he enjoyed coming to school and felt like coming to work each day.

William came to Thornton from a large systemic Catholic school. He was quite bitter about the role of the Brisbane Catholic Education Office in the governance of his previous school:

...I was particularly dissatisfied with the way Brisbane Cath Ed conduct themselves as an institution which was supposedly responsible for teachers and children. I regard it really as - it has become very much a bureaucracy. And there’s too much self concern among the members of that particular group I’m afraid. We were working in a school which was virtually tumbling down, and we never saw a single person from Brisbane Cath Ed during that time. The school has been rebuilt now but it should never have got to the stage where it got to. At the same time it would appear that the present director is generally antagonistic towards teachers, and has no belief in teacher autonomy or professionalism. It is very much a ‘we know what you need to do’ model, and you go and do it. T31.34

A different ‘system’, but William’s disquiet about being told what to do from a remote office at the headquarters of CEO raises similar concerns to those expressed by Max about the government system of education.

Clearly the freedom from the restrictions of bureaucracy at Thornton facilitates the building of a collegial and consultative staff culture. Teachers appreciate the lack of red tape and the direct line of decision-making which they can access as a result of this reduced bureaucracy. The influence of minimised bureaucracy is therefore a very positive influence on teacher autonomy at the school.
Chapter summary

A number of structural influences clearly exerted some influence upon the experience of individual autonomy for teachers at Thornton. Negative community perceptions about teachers and the nature of their work were reported by Thornton teachers, but there was a sense that the strength of respect from within the school, acted as a buffer to external community perceptions. Perceptions by the administrators about the response of Thornton’s ‘market’ to particular issues, were shown to have compromised the individual autonomy of teachers, by limiting their influence in the decision-making process. Factors arising from the structure and processes of the school, such as size, lack of time and a limited bureaucracy, were also shown to influence individual teacher autonomy.
CHAPTER EIGHT  THE DYNAMICS OF INDIVIDUAL TEACHER AUTONOMY

This case study of teachers at work in a Queensland independent school found that teachers understood their experience of personal freedom or individual autonomy in their work at three levels, in terms of their:

- work in the classroom
- working life in the school
- voice in the decision-making processes of the school.

Teachers at Thornton valued and actively sought opportunities to exercise control over their working lives at these three levels.

The teachers' understandings and experiences of autonomy were encumbered or facilitated by a number of influences. There were influences exerted by a range of stakeholder groups that could be characterised as being either internal or external to the school community. There were also a number of influences that were not exercised by individuals, groups of people or organisations but by forces that circulate as a result of the particular structures of the school or the social and economic structures in Australian society.

The framework of influence and response (represented in Figure 1) surrounding the experience of individual teacher autonomy at Thornton, was constantly shifting. Despite this fluidity, there were clearly emergent patterns to the dynamics within the framework. Certain factors were found to underpin contexts in which teachers perceived high levels of autonomy in their work. These were a consensus of educational vision, and trust and respect between teachers and stakeholders. The
FIGURE 1: THE DYNAMICS OF INDIVIDUAL TEACHER AUTONOMY
second level of dynamic interplay in the framework of individual teacher autonomy was the
finding that influences on teacher autonomy were exercised by stakeholders for one of two
reasons - a demand for accountability or a desire for relatedness. Finally, power was found to be
located inequitably in the framework, and as a result certain inequalities emerged in the social
relations in the school, and impacted upon the dynamics of individual teacher autonomy.

1. Foundations for teacher autonomy

Three interconnected factors underpinned the experience of individual autonomy for teachers at
Thornton - consensus of educational vision, trust and respect. Where teachers enjoyed a
relatively high level of individual autonomy, these qualities were found to exist as the foundations
for relationships between stakeholders in schools.

Where a consensus on educational mission and vision exists in a school, the potential for teacher
autonomy is likely to be greater because there is an underlying presumption that teachers will do
the ‘right thing’ with that autonomy, because everyone shares an understanding of what the ‘right
thing’ is. As noted by Pateman, “professional freedom is acceptable so long as the ends or
different ends being pursued are not generally contested, and can co-exist, if diverse, without
creating a pressing awareness of incompatibility” (1981, p.382) (See also Dale, 1981, p.310). At
Thornton, there were generally clarity and consensus about the ends. The successful promotion of
the Thornton way as a philosophical framework for teachers, administrators and students, created
a strong sense of shared understandings about the school’s mission and educational vision.
Tensions between stakeholders emerged at points where the ends, or process to achieve such
ends, were contested and there was not, as a result, a consensus position. The student grooming
incident was an example of such a breakdown in a consensus (chapter 5.1(I)).

Where a consensus does exist, a high level of trust is likely to develop between teachers and the various stakeholders in the educational community. It is a trust or faith in the conviction that each party will ‘operate’ in accordance with the values embedded in the shared understandings of the educational philosophy. Respect for each other and the contributions of each will result from the foundation of consensus and trust. Where there is contestation of the shared understandings, the bonds of trust and respect will be strained, if not broken. The degree of autonomy enjoyed by teachers in such circumstances is likely to be challenged, and the level of influence exerted by stakeholders will be considered by teachers to be unacceptable.

At Thornton, trust and respect were qualities that formed a firm foundation for the sound working relationships that existed between teachers and stakeholders in the school. I saw strong evidence of reciprocity of trust and respect in relationships between stakeholders and teachers. As discussed in chapter 5.1, teachers at Thornton generally felt they were trusted and respected by the school leadership. The experience of trust and respect was established in part by a number of symbolic actions taken by school leaders, for example, the commitment by the School Council of a large sum of money to the school crèche (chapter 4.2(v)); or the control that subject coordinators have over budgets (chapter 4.1(iv)). These built to form what Richard Simpson called goodwill (A2.168) between stakeholders.

Although I did not interview students or parents (except staff members who were also parents), I developed a strong sense that the generally positive ambiance of the school could not exist if there
were not trust and respect for staff from these groups. If parents did not trust and respect teachers, they could ‘vote with their feet’ by withdrawing their children from the school. The school’s healthy enrolment profile suggested that teachers were maintaining the support of parents. If students did not trust and respect teachers they would be unlikely to be as well-behaved and disciplined as I experienced them to be (see chapter 4.1(iii)). Clearly, there was a foundation of trust and respect established between teachers and the internal stakeholders at Thornton.

Reciprocally, Thornton’s teachers generally trusted and respected other members of the school community. The way in which teachers at Thornton interacted with students suggested that there was a foundation of trust and respect for the student body, although individual students occasionally tested the strength of this foundation. The section on the influence of parents (chapter 5.4) showed that parents were perceived by teachers to be generally supportive of their endeavours, and the input of parents to the school was valued and appreciated by teachers. Most teachers respected parents for their contributions to the school. Generally, the senior administrators and subject co-ordinators have earned the trust and respect of teachers in the school as has been documented throughout the study.

The one shadow over this foundation of trust and respect, was in relation to general community perceptions of teachers (chapter 7.1). Many Thornton teachers felt that as an occupational group they were not generally trusted or respected in the broader community. However, because of the strength of the trust and respect within the school, they perceived that their experience of teacher autonomy was not limited by this.
It emerged therefore, that the existence of a consensus on educational goals and vision, and strong expressions of trust and respect in a school, contributes to the establishment of a firm foundation for the potential exercise of influences that facilitate and nourish individual teacher autonomy.

2. Motivational factors

Two factors emerged from this study as reasons for the exercise of influence over individual teacher autonomy. These were the demand for accountability and the desire for relatedness. In some cases both factors contributed to the exercise of influences over teacher autonomy.

Certain influences were exerted upon teacher autonomy as a result of pressures on teachers to be accountable for their work. At its most instrumental, accountability is “the submission of the institution or individual to a form of external audit, its capacity to account for its or their own performance” (Scott, 1989, p.17). Influences on teacher autonomy were exerted by a number of stakeholders and structural pressures, in order to call teachers to account for their practices and performances. Teachers saw themselves and were seen by others to be accountable to a number of stakeholders in the education community, including senior administrators, subject coordinators, colleagues, students, parents and external organisations such as the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies.

Influence may be exercised so the accountability owed by teachers will be controlled and regulated by stakeholders in what becomes a one-way relationship. In such a scenario the influence of a stakeholder is likely to be experienced by teachers as an unacceptable infringement
of their autonomy as workers. Alternatively, stakeholders may exert influence because they demand accountability from teachers, but in a manner that facilitates a two-way relationship between themselves and teachers. The exercise of control in such circumstances is more likely to be construed by teachers as an acceptable limitation to their individual autonomy. The implementation of the model of discipline management at Thornton reflects this approach (chapter 4.1(iii)). The school’s discipline problems could have been addressed by the introduction by the senior administrators of a new layer of hierarchy in the school structure. Thornton did not adopt such a model. Instead, the co-principals consulted with teachers and ultimately established a team of teachers, comprising two people at each year level, to assist teachers in the discipline of students. The motivation for the establishment of the Student Management Team was the need for greater accountability and consistency from teachers in the discipline of students. This accountability was perceived to be owed in the first instance, to the senior administrators, and then ultimately to students and parents. The change process was initially prompted by the senior administrators but it involved consultation with teachers at each stage, and at no point took away the individual teacher’s responsibility for student discipline. Restrictions to teachers’ individual autonomy as a result of the intervention of the Student Management Team on discipline issues, were considered to be not only acceptable by teachers, but generally supportive of teachers, and thus perhaps not experienced as a restriction on individual autonomy at all.

In addition to stakeholder influences, certain structural influences were exercised upon individual teacher autonomy as a result of pressures upon teachers to be accountable. For example, independent schools such as Thornton adopt conservative stances on issues such as student grooming in part because of the influence of perceived market forces (see chapter 7.2). The
Thornton administration made an assessment of community norms on the issue of student grooming. They perceived that the school and teachers were accountable to those norms. As a result, boys with pony tails or students adorned with nose studs, were not to be allowed in the school. The influence of conventions of rigid gender stereotypes and market pressures, were interpreted in such a way as to produce a decision that was surprisingly inconsistent with the rhetoric of consultative school decision-making processes, and the ‘progressive’ agenda that the administrators followed on so many issues.

Demands for accountability may also motivate the level of bureaucracy existing in a school (chapter 7.4). The pressure for greater centralised control of teachers and their work grows out of calls for accountability from schools and teachers. One way in which many education systems and schools have responded to these calls is by establishing more bureaucratic structures to check and assess teachers in their work. Such a bureaucracy has not developed at Thornton. There were a number of factors that have contributed to the limited bureaucracy existing in the school, but in part, bureaucratic structures have not escalated because the administrators have not seen such controls of teachers to be appropriate or necessary.

Equally instrumental in motivating the exertion of influence by stakeholders or structural pressures on teacher autonomy, were desires for relatedness. By relatedness, I mean a desire or need for building relationships within classrooms, departments, schools, or the broader educational community. Simply put - teachers and each stakeholder in the education community, seek to make meaningful connections or relationships with other people. Two-way relationships are sought, and in some circumstances, established and sustained. Certain influences on teacher
autonomy are therefore motivated by stakeholders’ desires to build relationships with individuals, groups of teachers or within groups of teachers. The desire for relatedness may be expressed through influences that limit teachers’ experience of individual autonomy, or in such a way that the influence facilitates teachers’ sense of control over their work.

At Thornton, there were numerous examples of the forging of relationships of relatedness between teachers and stakeholders. The senior administrators demonstrated a desire for relatedness with teachers, which they expressed in a number of ways, for example: the daily greeting of individual teachers; joining staff for lunch; consulting with staff individually; and adopting a consultative leadership style. Their desire to build personal relationships with teachers generally resulted in the exercise of influences that facilitated teacher autonomy.

The desire of colleagues for relatedness is one of the strongest internal influences on teacher autonomy, particularly in a school like Thornton with such an emphasis on collegiality (chapter 5.2). Teachers at Thornton were involved in a number of formal structures designed to facilitate collegiality, such as collegial groups, committees, teachers’ meetings and the School Council (chapter 4.3). In addition, there was strong evidence of expressions of more informal collegial connections, in the pattern of teachers’ interactions in the common room and around the school grounds. The desires of colleagues to build relationships with each other at Thornton did not appear to compromise or infringe the sense of autonomy expressed by individual teachers. There were concerns about the amount of time such relationships took to build, but the positive influence of collegiality on autonomy was acknowledged. It was an influence that was acceptable to teachers because of the benefits it produced.
Parents may exert influences on teacher autonomy through the fostering of relationships with the teachers of their children (chapter 5.4). Some parents are motivated to get involved in the work of teachers, not because of their demand for teachers to be accountable to them, but because they wish better to understand their children, teachers and classroom contexts. The desire for relatedness may be expressed by a parent in such a way that the teacher feels acknowledged as an 'expert' and supported by the parent. The teacher is likely to gain confidence from the expression of explicit support and feel a strengthened sense of control over her/his work. Alternatively, parents may exercise their desires for relatedness through influence which teachers resent and, as a result, they contest parental involvement. The desire for relatedness may in such circumstances be read by teachers as challenges to their individual autonomy. At Thornton, parents clearly exerted some influence on individual teacher autonomy, but it was not interpreted by teachers as an infringement to their autonomy. Parental involvement was generally seen by teachers to be supportive of teachers, and emanating from a desire by parents to be included as partners in the school community.

An external stakeholder such as the union may also influence teacher autonomy out of a desire to foster relatedness (chapter 6.2). In an attempt to capture the support and interest of teachers who perceive themselves as 'professionals' rather than workers, teacher unions such as QATIS have attempted to forge a role beyond their traditional guise as industrial advocates. QATIS has encouraged the establishment of union chapters in schools with the goal of fostering a stronger collegial spirit amongst union members and collegial debate on educational and industrial issues. These chapters represent another forum in the collegial landscape of schools with the potential to influence decision-making in schools and the education community. Depending upon the way
such a chapter functions in a school, and the relationship the chapter negotiates with the school administration, it may become a powerful voice for teachers in a school. If the chapter establishes a poor relationship with the school administration it may well act as a catalyst for administrators to attempt to silence the chapter and thus the voices of teachers. The development of school-based units of the union, has stemmed in part from the desire of union leaders to stimulate relatedness among teacher unionists in a school, and between the central office of the union and teachers in a school.

Some of the structural forces identified in chapter 7 may also be exerted as influences upon teacher autonomy as a result of desires to build connections with teachers. For example, the time available to teachers is significantly affected by desires for relatedness on the part of colleagues. Teachers need a certain amount of time to maintain a high level of autonomy in their work in classrooms and the amount of time available in the working day is likely to be reduced by pressures to build collegial relationships.

Demands for accountability and desires for relatedness were interconnected at Thornton and there were significant backwash effects from one to the other. The nature of the relationships that result from high levels of relatedness are likely to have a significant influence on the way in which pressures for accountability are exerted. Where such relationships are based on respect and trust between the parties, there is a strong chance that external accountability measures which control and regulate teachers' work will be reduced. For example, at Thornton the teacher appraisal model adopted at the school was a direct result of the administrators' trust of and respect for teachers (see chapter 5.1(i)). The administrators could have decided that teachers could not be
trusted to make an earnest commitment to a model of teacher appraisal based on professional development and peer review, and instead introduced a hierarchical model of performance appraisal, controlled by themselves or external appraisers. They did not make such a decision partly because of their trust and respect for teachers.

Similarly, the pressure for teachers to be accountable to a range of stakeholders is likely to influence the level and nature of relatedness between individual teachers and other stakeholders, which can be sustained within a school. A subject co-ordinator, for example, may seek to facilitate the autonomy of teachers in their department by pursuing a non-authoritarian leadership style which encourages collegial connections and relatedness among peers (chapter 5.1(ii)). If the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies decides to impose new comparability measures for assessment which mean the co-ordinator is forced to monitor the work of teachers more closely, the nature of relatedness will inevitably change, with a corresponding reduction in individual teacher autonomy.

The finding that individual teacher autonomy was influenced by a range of stakeholders or pressures, motivated by demands or desires for either or both accountability and relatedness, challenges the conventional wisdom that accountability measures are the major limitation to individual teacher autonomy. There is little doubt that the accountability measures of the kinds described by Cohn & Kottkamp (1993, p.16) or Apple (1986, p.154) have seriously reduced the control which individual teachers exercise over their work in the United States. But even in an educational context such as Thornton, where external controls exist but are not omnipotent, and where teachers applaud the level of individual autonomy they perceive they experience in their
work, demands for relatedness from others in the school community influence the degree of individual autonomy experienced. Demands and desires for both relatedness and accountability clearly influence teachers’ experience of individual autonomy.

3. Locations of power

In seeking individual autonomy in their work, teachers seek the power to control their lives in the classroom, their working lives in schools, and the decisions which are made in a school. At Thornton, teachers perceived that they experienced high levels of autonomy in these three areas, but it became clear that these experiences were subject to the influence of numerous stakeholders and pressures. Embedded in the framework of influences upon individual teacher autonomy was the potential for manifest inequalities based on gender, class, race, ethnicity, age or sexuality. What inequities emerged in the way teacher autonomy was played out in social relations at Thornton, and where was the power to exercise control over teacher autonomy located in these relations?

In a large part, power in Thornton was located in the discourse embodying *the Thornton way* - the composite of constructed meanings and shared practices which were promoted and accepted as the commonly understood culture of the school by most teachers in the school. Social interactions in the school were framed by precepts such as collegiality, caring, community and individuality. These qualities were constantly promoted by the senior administrators and teachers as *the Thornton way* of doing things. As discussed in chapter 3.5, this framework was pervasive, and teachers have had little success in challenging its dominance or in attempting to modify its meanings and their expression. In a seeming paradox, however, teachers’ experiences of
individual autonomy have been facilitated by the potency of the Thornton way in the school culture. The shared meanings and practices of the Thornton way embrace the importance of Thornton's origins as a 'teachers' school' and the commitment of the founders to enabling teachers to have control of their work and a 'real' influence in the school.

The successful promotion of the Thornton way in the school culture was largely due to the fact that the two people who created the vision and philosophy for the school remain in key positions of influence in the school - as co-principals and members of the School Council. Their presence reinforced the connections with the original educational vision, and their influence dictated the evolution of that vision. The ultimate exercise of control and power in the school was located with these two men, despite the rhetoric and practice of consultative and collaborative decision-making. Occasional and significant gaps emerged between the rhetoric promoted in the school and the practice. The existence of a limited hierarchy in the school did not mean that the responsibility for ultimate decision-making was abdicated, and consequently a number of teachers described the style of leadership in the school as 'partial democracy'. The final right to make decisions remained with the co-principals, to be delegated as they saw fit. Despite their best intentions to represent themselves and the female deputy principal as a team of equals, avoiding traditionally conceived gender or school hierarchies, ultimately power remained firmly located with them. On the occasions when they moved away from the consultative decision-making processes which they espoused and generally implemented, tension and conflict arose.

A combination of the potency of the vision and the respect teachers demonstrated for the co-principals, resulted in a reluctance on the part of teachers to air 'dirty linen' about the operation
of the school. Many teachers downplayed their complaints or concerns about the exercise of relations of power in the school, because of the strength of their relationships with the co-principals, and this ultimately contributed to what could be interpreted as an overly rosy picture of the school. Their perceptions of autonomy were therefore, to some extent coloured by the pervasiveness of the Thornton way, and the location of power with the co-principals.

Where else was power located in the school? In terms of gendered power relations in the school, the over-representation of men in positions of subject co-ordinators when compared with their total representation on staff, stands out (chapter 3.3). As 36% of the teaching staff, men held 52% of the middle management positions, and both of the most senior positions in the school. Men, therefore, dominated the official positions of power in the school, out of all proportion to their representation on staff. Their potential for influence from this dominance, was however, somewhat mediated by the strength of the Thornton way. The culture of collegiality and caring in the school was instrumental in moderating the position of men in the school, and as a result they did not dominate social relations in the school.

Two indicators of the moderated influence of men, would be the 'loudness' and the frequency of male voices in the formal structures of the school’s decision-making processes. Male subject co-ordinators did not dominate discussion at the one subject co-ordinators’ meeting I attended, as the breakdown of talk at this meeting showed that men and women spoke in proportion to their representation at the meeting (Field notes, 6.3.95). Similarly, men did not ‘hold the floor’ in teachers’ meetings (see chapter 4.3(ii)). Some of the most articulate and outspoken members of staff were women, just as some of the most passive and silent members of staff were male.
Despite the number of men in leadership positions, typically masculine styles of leadership did not dominate in the school. The models of leadership generally exercised by the senior administrators and those in middle management positions focused on collaboration and consultation with staff, attempting to empower teachers rather than control them.

The large, predominantly female part-time teaching staff at Thornton presented a particular dimension to gendered relations of power within the school. As was discussed in chapter 4.3, the nature of their work loads meant that many of these women were not able to make the same commitment as full-time teachers to committee work or other decision-making structures in the school. Their voices in the decision-making processes of the school were, as a result, somewhat circumscribed. Yet, their control over their working and personal lives was considerably enabled by the availability of a crèche, flexible approaches to timetabling and their acceptance as part-time workers in a climate in which so many schools are reluctant to employ part-time teachers.

The age profile of Thornton’s teaching staff indicated that, unsurprisingly, age was an issue in the location of power, in that those with official positions of management were in the main in their late thirties or older. However, I saw no evidence that the voices of the young teachers were given less space in the consultative and collegial decision-making processes in the school or that their opinions were less valued because they were not based on many years of teaching experience. Whilst age itself may not have created manifest inequalities in the social relations in the school, what did seem to make a difference were the number of years teachers had been involved in the school. The small group of people who founded the school or were founding staff, remain active in the school as teachers. They are perceived by some newer teachers to be a
distinct group within the school with considerable power and control, although their influence is waning slowly with the introduction of a new cohort of staff each year. Several of the group have cultivated their identity as founding staff and this has caused tension amongst staff, particularly as their perceived power-base has been seen to influence decision-making in the school. There is a sense among some staff, that 'they', the founding staff, were 'here first', and thus that they have favoured status in the school.

I considered whether the level of individual autonomy enjoyed by gay and lesbian teachers was any less at Thornton, because of their minority status in the community, and the difficulties such teachers have traditionally experienced in schools, particularly independent church schools. The tacit acceptance by Thornton’s administrators of gay and lesbian teachers as 'full' members of the school community suggested otherwise. These teachers felt the school climate gave them the freedom to 'be themselves', rather than forcing them to maintain an elaborate facade about their private lives. I concluded that they were likely to enjoy similar levels of autonomy to other teachers at the school.

Issues of race and ethnicity were notable at Thornton by their absence. On the basis of a superficial assessment, Thornton’s students and teachers were overwhelmingly white, middle class and of Anglo-Saxon background. I did not ask teachers about their ethnic or racial origins during the interviews, however, so it is impossible to offer an accurate picture. It is interesting to note, however, that the predominantly white and middle class profile of the student body was a real concern for a number of teachers. Their concern did not extend to the limited representation of a variety of ethnic or racial groups in the profile of the teaching staff at Thornton.
No matter how autonomous teachers at Thornton may perceive themselves to be, the inescapable reality is that they remain employees. As such, their ability to sustain an autonomous working life is subject to the restraints which exist upon any worker who is not self-employed. As teachers in an independent school, this relationship is brought into sharper focus because the employers are not removed or reified as they are for state school teachers ('the state' being the employer). Teachers at Thornton may be employed officially by the School Council, but in every pragmatic sense, their employers are the co-principals, whom they see and interact with on a daily basis. This intimacy acts to remind the teacher of her or his role and responsibilities as an employee.

Teachers' understandings and experiences of individual autonomy at Thornton are clearly coloured by the inequitable locations of power outlined in this section. These inequalities are manifested in the framework of influences upon teacher autonomy.

Conclusion

The framework of teacher autonomy which emerged from this case study, highlights the contextual and fluid nature of individual teacher autonomy. Teachers at Thornton perceived that they experienced relatively high levels of individual autonomy at the three levels of understanding that emerged, yet a critical analysis revealed that there were very real limitations to their autonomy. The exercise of influence by a number of stakeholders and structural pressures, produced some limitations which teachers found to be acceptable, and some which they contested as unacceptable infringements to their autonomy. Thornton's overall effectiveness as a workplace for teachers was framed by the particular interactions which emerged from this framework. It is hoped that the understandings and experiences of individual autonomy shared by Thornton's
teachers provide other teachers and administrators with a framework for better understanding their own experiences of autonomy and work in schools.
Chapter 2

1. Direct quotations from interviews are shown in italics in both indented quotations and within the text. The code at the end of the extract denotes the category of staff member: T= teacher; S= support staff; A=administrator; the number allocated to that individual; and the line from the interview transcript in the form created within the NUD*IST program. Three dots within an interview extract indicate that the extract has been edited and some text removed. Some italicised extracts from interviews have no identifying code because information within the extract or context may reveal the identity of the speaker.

Chapter 3

1. Government funding of non-government schools has been contentious in Australia since the earliest attempts to set up religious parochial schools in the nineteenth century. What has become known as the 'State Aid debate' has raised its head on numerous occasions, particularly around the time of federal elections. In part, this has occurred because community ire about government support for non-government schools has focused on federal involvement, not the states' involvement, as a result of the constitutional arrangements supporting state responsibility for education.

By the 1960s, the notion that the federal government had some responsibility for the financial support of education on a national basis was widely accepted. Successive Liberal-Country Party Governments acted on this responsibility with a range of funding packages to government and non-government schools. In 1964, Prime Minister Menzies made capital grants to fund science laboratories in both government and non-government schools. Four years later, a similar scheme was implemented to build libraries in Australian schools. In 1969 in a particularly bold move, Malcolm Fraser, as federal Minister for Education and Science, introduced per capita recurrent financial assistance for secondary and primary schools in the non-government sector.

A Labor Government was elected in 1972 after twenty-three years of federal conservative rule in Australia. The new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, came to power with a strong education platform and ten days after the election he established the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission. Under the leadership of Professor Peter Karmel, this committee produced a report entitled *Schools in Australia* (1973), which among other things recommended the implementation of needs-based funding for non-government schools. The Committee sought to ensure that all Australian schools reached a certain acceptable standard by the end of the 1970s, and established the principle that "the standard of schooling a child receives should not depend on what his parents are able or willing to contribute directly to it, or whether he is enrolled in a government or non-government institution" (1973, 2.7).

Funding on a 'needs' basis was in major part a response to the desperate conditions experienced in many Catholic schools throughout the country, but all non-government schools were to benefit to some extent from the prospective funding arrangements. Teese (1981) goes so far as to claim that *Schools in Australia* provided "the ideological rationale for the public financing of private
schools on a reliable and comprehensive basis” (p.94).

The culmination of the State Aid debate was the ‘DOGS case’, a constitutional challenge led by the Council for the Defence of Government Schools, to the Commonwealth government’s educational funding provisions, launched in the High Court in December 1972. The High Court found that the federal government’s actions in making per capita grants to non-government schools was within the ambit of Section 96 of the Constitution, and not a contravention of Section 116 which prohibited government support for religion.

In 1973, as a result of the Karmel Report recommendations, the States Grants (Schools) Act (1973) was passed by the Labor Government, which established a comprehensive framework for the provision of assistance to government and non-government schools. The newly created Schools’ Commission (retitled the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1981) was to administer the new funding arrangements which included capital and recurrent grants for disadvantaged schools. In an attempt to bring all non-government schools up to a similar level to that of government schools, the Commonwealth devised a system of needs categories from ‘A’ to ‘H’, adjudicated on the basis of a school’s daily running costs.

Accompanying increased Commonwealth funding to schools were greater accountability measures. Prime Minister Whitlam had foreshadowed this as a general principle, in his speech to the 1973 Premier’s Conference, stating that “from now on we will expect to be involved in the planning of the functions in which we are financially involved” (Emy, in Patience and Scott, 1983, p.7). The State Grants (Schools) Act (1973) required schools, both government and non-government, to provide detailed information about their accounting systems, enrolments and human resource management. This power to set conditions for the allocation of funds, continues to enable the Commonwealth to wield considerable influence in the development of educational policy.

With the backdrop of an international economic recession and a range of difficulties with the administration and disbursement of recurrent grants, in 1975, the Schools Commission outlined alternative funding strategies, based on the guiding principles of equity, needs and efficiency. The Commission developed the Schools Recurrent Resources Index (SRRI) to measure the relative resource use in government and non-government schools. Expenditure on teachers’ salaries was a major element in these calculations, and due to the dramatic decline of religious personnel teaching in Catholic schools, the payment of increased numbers of lay teachers’ salaries was a looming concern to many schools in the non-government sector.

The Whitlam Labor Government was removed from office in November 1975, and succeeded by the Fraser Coalition Government. It adopted a combination of educational funding approaches within its policy of “new federalism” but claimed to maintain the needs principle and differential funding arrangements. Specific purpose grants declined in use and general grants were distributed using tax-sharing arrangements with the states, which returned a proportion of Commonwealth tax collected in a particular state, to that state, to be used according to state priorities. The Coalition maintained a strong philosophical and financial commitment to supporting parents’ rights to choose non-government schools for their children. This was reflected in the increase in funding for the non-government sector, and in particular, in the increases in funding to category
‘A’ schools. In 1976, new instructions were given by the Fraser Government to the Schools Commission, to the effect that “federal funding must change so that by 1980 every private school, regardless of need, would receive at least 20 per cent of the total running costs of the government school” (Macintyre, 1985, p.113). There were also federal funding arrangements introduced to provide additional capital assistance for the establishment of new private schools.

The return of a Labor government under the leadership of Bob Hawke, in the 1983 federal election, saw the newly instated Minister for Education, Senator Susan Ryan, abolish the Schools Recurrent Resource Index. The incoming government argued that the index did not effectively redistribute funds between schools on the basis of need. Accompanying this reassertion of the needs principle were a number of other changes, including the controversial reduction by 25% of the recurrent grants to the forty-one wealthiest private schools in Category 1, and the stabilisation of grants to other schools in that category. There was considerable reaction from the non-government education sector over this action, as other schools feared that more was to come.

After a period of considerable agitation by the non-government education lobby, the Labor Government announced “an extremely generous funding policy designed to defuse the state aid debate and keep everybody happy by making more money available for virtually all schools and simultaneously giving long-term stability by promising legislation guaranteeing levels of funding for four years” (Smart et al, 1986, p.68). In addition, recommendations by the Commonwealth Schools Commission relating to a twelve category system of need, to be known as the Education Resources Index (ERI) were adopted. The Commission recommendation that all schools receive some aid was also endorsed, ensuring that even the wealthiest schools would have their existing Commonwealth grants maintained in real terms.

The non-government sector also benefited from the restoration of retrospective cost supplementation. This meant that the Commonwealth undertook to maintain the real value of grants, with the proviso to adjust them if there were significant increases in teacher salaries. This move was of particular interest to the Catholic sector, which has continued to struggle with the legacy of the reduction of members of religious orders teaching in their schools, and the consequent need to employ full salaried lay staff at all levels.

In April 1989, the Department of Employment, Education and Training issued a discussion paper proposing to retain the key elements of existing funding arrangements for non-government schools, including needs-based funding, the twelve funding categories, and the assessment of needs on the basis of a school’s total private income. A new process was introduced to recategorise schools every four years.

In 1995, independent schools such as Thornton were funded through a combination of parental and private contributions, and large packages of state and federal aid. Commonwealth funding continues to be needs-based. Government schools are funded in the main by the Queensland government (90%), with the Commonwealth government contributing 10% of running costs. The Commonwealth Government is the major source of external funding of non-government schools. Independent schools are free to operate as they wish but if they seek government funding they must meet the requirements stipulated by the Commonwealth Government.
2. One year after reaching full secondary status, the Thornton School Council undertook a school evaluation. In October 1992, the Thornton Evaluation Report was presented to the School Council, which reported on four identified areas of the school life: Intellectual Achievement, Personal and Spiritual Development, the Built Environment and Thornton and the wider community. The Administrative team described the brief of this review in the following terms: "Members of the parent and teacher body of the school and people with particular expertise from outside the school community were invited by the School Council to embark on an evaluation of the school's first 5 years" (Reflections 6, 1992, p.5).

3. Enterprise bargaining is the process of employer-employee negotiation which was introduced by the federal government in the early 1990s. A recent QATIS broadsheet, described enterprise bargaining as "the main avenue open to employees to gain wage increases under the current wage fixing principles of the Industrial Relations Commission" (The Independent Teacher, 1996, p.5). It was orchestrated as a means of improving workplace performance and productivity through direct negotiations between employers and employees. The resulting enterprise agreement is ideally one which suits the particular needs of the employer, employees and the enterprise.

It is a process which has been particularly difficult in the education sector. Government teachers in Western Australia and South Australia have endured protracted negotiations with their employers which have resulted in ongoing industrial unrest. In Queensland, QATIS described the process as "not one which employees and unions welcome" (The Independent Teacher, 1995, p.1). The forced procedure of employees negotiating directly with employers without an independent third party to facilitate the process, as was the case in the previous system under the National Wage Case, has hampered the resolution of agreements in several sectors.

The enterprise bargaining process begins with a union being granted ‘Principal union status’ and then initiating the bargaining period. A Single Bargaining Unit is then established, which consists of employees, employers and union representatives. Some independent schools have chosen to be Single Bargaining Units in themselves, and others like Thornton College have chosen to join with other schools in their sector. The agreement must then be negotiated between these parties in such a way that identified areas of productivity and efficiency increases are to be rewarded with wage increases. The Single Bargaining Unit returns the draft agreement to all employees, employers and a School Consultative Committee, for discussion and eventual endorsement. The final agreement is then registered with the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for approval to become a certified agreement.

Chapter 4

1. The Student Management Team was created in response to problems which emerged with respect to the management of student discipline in the school. The co-principals had handled most discipline issues since the school began, and they relished the close contact with students which such opportunities presented them. But as the school has grown, this approach ceased to meet the needs of students, teachers or administrators. Richard Simpson was willing to acknowledge that there had been a problem with the management of discipline in the school:

   *It was the three of us who dealt with any discipline problems...and we'd be bogged down sometimes for days, if there was a discipline problem - which is not acceptable, because...*
we must be carrying the big picture of the school forward. A2.315

This awareness had existed for some years, because in the report on his sabbatical Richard notes that:

It is a very real problem that when a major behaviour or discipline breach occurs at Thornton, the school’s admin. team is drawn completely into it and the formal leadership functions of the school come to a halt till the issue is resolved: at least a week, usually longer. Of course, this is a consequence of our decision to have a “lean” administration and leadership team which absorbs a lot of these pressures so teachers can focus on their classroom work. (Report on Study Leave, 1993, p.21)

Teaching staff were also well aware that a problem existed. Samantha focused on the changes that increases in size imposed on the administration team, particularly in terms of their accessibility to teaching staff:

...the school was getting to maturity with the grade 12s suddenly appearing, school at full size, but they were still carrying on the same structure, they were still carrying through the same procedures they had done before. So they (the administrators) handled everything...their time was being consumed and that was why they were not available. T28.120

Hazel described her perception of the problem:

...students were being sent out of class...up here (the administrative area)...for somebody else to deal with the problem. And it was happening much too regularly and once they got up here they weren’t always dealt with straight away because of all the other hassles about running a school. So I think that the admin weren’t able to deal with that effectively enough, plus run the school, so then there was a need to have a group of people to deal with these problem and to help staff deal with their own problems. T36.270

It is interesting that Hazel saw the obvious, or natural solution to the problem as “a group of people” to deal with discipline issues. In most schools, the establishment of such a group would not be the obvious or preferred solution. Most schools have a hierarchical structure to respond to student discipline. Many independent schools have year level coordinators who would be the first port of call for a student who has misbehaved, and then for more serious infringements, students would be sent to the “discipline” deputy or assistant to the principal. Adele Mathews observed that:

We didn’t want to go to employing someone, or me, becoming the discipline person. I’ve worked in schools where discipline is the third door on the left. And we didn’t want to go that way...we believe that there’s strength in it coming from a base - a broad base. And that if more people take on this responsibility then it’s stronger. A1.279

Hazel’s unquestioning acceptance that a group response was the solution, is testimony to the successful acculturation of teachers to the ‘Thornton way’. She has effectively absorbed the emphasis on team work embedded in the school ethos.

Apart from the pragmatic difficulties which developed because of the administration’s primary responsibility for discipline, there were also several educational dilemmas. One related to the perception that teachers may be abdicating their responsibility for dealing with discipline by passing student discipline problems to the top. The other issue was in relation to student perceptions of the discipline process. In having discipline meted out by one of the co-principals or
the deputy, students may come to see them as only disciplinarians, which is not the way the administration would wish to be perceived by students. Spreull referred to both aspects of the problem in his description of the Student Management Team:

...previously all serious discipline and some trivial, was sent to the office, we had all these hordes of kids sitting around looking dejected and it took hours and hours of the admin team and it was very much if you offended then you go to the top. Now, there is a great feeling throughout the school that if I offend then it's something that's going to be noticed within the body corporate of the school. Somebody is going to notice me around the passages and playgrounds...it's not going to be just a matter of going to the top. It's a much more collegial sort of community thing, and it's working very well T29.98

Richard Simpson returned from his sabbatical in 1993 impressed by the concept of the discipline committee common in American high schools. He reflected on the idea in his sabbatical report arguing that a discipline committee could be a “definite possibility” at Thornton, and that it would certainly be helpful for the school’s leadership team to be able to “stand back while major breaches of behaviour are handled by a committee” (Report on Study Leave, 1993, p.21). Adele Mathews, the deputy principal, was given the responsibility to chair a committee to explore the options for the management of discipline, the result being the establishment of the Student Management Team, which began in late 1994. In 1995, the SMT was chaired by Adele and consisted of two teachers allocated to each level in Years 8-10, three teachers for the two senior year levels, and the Student Advisor and Chaplain. They originally met as a group about once a week but by the middle of 1995 their meetings were held fortnightly.

Chapter 5

1. Thornton’s approach to teacher appraisal has been shaped by the following definition:

...a powerful form of professional and personal development. It means that teachers examine their own work and that of their colleagues in a purposeful, supportive climate. Overall, the objective is for all of us “to do the job better”. (Thornton Teacher Appraisal Booklet)

Each teacher proposes a plan for an improvement of some aspect of the teaching and learning processes in their classroom, which is submitted to TACC for approval. The criteria by which the project will be judged are established by the teacher. Each proposal must meet certain ‘essential’ requirements and indicators. The ‘essential’ requirements include student involvement, parent involvement, success criteria, the significance of the proposal in leading to improved practice, classroom observation and a wider perspective. The indicators are:

(i) Establishment of a purposeful, cooperative learning environment
(ii) Varied strategies for differing learning styles
(iii) Attention to gender issues
(iv) Strategies to promote higher order thinking processes
(v) Appropriate and varied use of technology
(vi) Regular constructive feedback on academic performance and desired behaviour
(vii) Commitment to on-going professional development, and application of it to classroom practice
(viii) Commitment to sharing professional skills and knowledge with colleagues

(Thornton Teacher Appraisal Booklet)

Two appraisers from either within or outside the school are chosen by the teacher to work
through the process with them. In addition to monitoring the progress of the project, the appraisers observe at least one lesson and give feedback to the teacher. Stage 10 of the cycle involves a written and oral report of the outcomes of the project to the appraisers and two members of TACC. The process is to be repeated every two to three years.
REFERENCES


*Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988*.


Queensland Board of Teacher Education. (1981). *The induction of beginning primary teachers.* Toowong, Brisbane: Board of Teacher Education.

Queensland Board of Teacher Education. (1987). *Project 21: Teachers for the twenty-first century.* Brisbane: Board of Teacher Education.

Queensland Board of Teacher Registration. (1995). *The Registered Teacher, October, 10*.


**Thornton References**


*Thornton Information Booklet*.


*Thornton Student Diary*, 1995.


Welcome to Thornton College (Student booklet), 1995.


APPENDIX A: THE QUEENSLAND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Constitutional responsibility for education

There are six states in the federation of the Commonwealth of Australia, and a number of territories. The states have major constitutional and financial responsibility for schooling. Section 51 of the Australian Constitution sets out the 'specific' powers of the federal government, and by default those powers which are not listed are called 'residual', and become the province of the states. Education is not mentioned in Section 51, and consequently it has become a state power and responsibility.

There have been, however, a number of constitutional strategies which have enabled successive federal governments to stake an interest in Australian education: Section 109 gives federal law precedence over state legislation where inconsistencies may arise; and through Section 81 - the appropriation power - the Commonwealth has the potential to control the states through the distribution of federally collected revenue. Section 51 also provides the Commonwealth with the potential to exercise power to make laws to “benefit students”. The primary tool used by the Commonwealth to increase its involvement in education has been through Section 96 of the Constitution, which gives the federal government the power to make ‘specific purpose’ grants to the states, “on such terms and conditions as the Parliament think fit”.

Education in Queensland

Queensland separated from New South Wales to become a distinct state in 1859. The Education Act of 1860 established a Queensland Board of General Education, which implemented a primary curriculum modelled closely on the Irish National system. In the same year, the foundations were laid for a system of secondary education, with the Grammar Schools Act, although the first grammar school was not founded until 1863. It was not until 1912 that any state secondary schools were established. Primary education was made compulsory and secular under the State Education Act of 1875. Compulsory schooling up to the age of 15 was introduced in 1964.

The University of Queensland was established as Queensland’s first university in 1911, and there were seven universities in Queensland in 1996. The Junior (admission to year 11) and Senior (admission to tertiary education) Public Examinations were run by the University until 1970, and the secondary curriculum was consequently tailored to meet the requirements of these examinations. In 1970, the Radford Report was released, and its major recommendation was for the removal of public external examinations in Queensland. In their place a system of internal moderated school assessment in secondary schools was introduced. The Board of Secondary School Studies (BSSS) was established in 1971, initially to take responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations of the Radford Report. It took responsibility for all secondary curriculum (Years 8 to 12), until 1989. It was then reconstituted as the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS) and assumed responsibility for the curriculum, monitoring and certification for Years 11 and 12 only.

Some eight years after the Radford Report, the Queensland parliament commissioned a review of school-based assessment (ROSBA - the Scott Committee Report). The recommendations of this
committee moved Queensland secondary schools from norm-based assessment, to competency based assessment, using criterion referencing. The process instigated by this report involved teachers of each ‘Board’ approved subject in a school, writing a Work Program for their subject, based on a BSSSS developed syllabus. This program is then submitted to district panels for accreditation by the BSSSS, and teaching and assessment of students in that subject, in that school, must abide by the program. Assessment at years 11 and 12 is monitored by district panels (comprised of teachers from schools in each of the Board districts in Queensland), and then approved. A number of reviews of the Queensland education system have taken place since the *Radford Report*, each of which has recommended some modifications to the system of school-based assessment (Scott (1978), Ahern (1979), Viviani (1990), Wiltshire et al (1994)).

The certification process for completing secondary students in 1995 is a complex combination of school-based assessment and externally adjudicated measures. At the end of Year 12, a student receives a Student Education Profile which has two parts - the Senior Certificate and a Tertiary Entrance Statement. The Senior Certificate is issued by the BSSSS, and is completed over the Years 11 and 12. It contains school subject results and a Queensland Core Skills Test result. The student’s Tertiary Entrance Statement is issued by the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority and contains an Overall Position (OP), which indicates a student’s rank-order position on overall achievement in BSSSS subjects. The OP is used by tertiary institutions to determine university entrance.

**Non-government schooling in Queensland**

Thornton College is one of 2,526 non-government schools in Australia according to statistics released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (1996). Just over one quarter of the 9,648 schools in Australia are non-government schools, and in 1995, 29% of full-time students in Australia were enrolled at one of these schools (ABS, 1996, p.3). Over the past decade there has been a steady increase in the number of students enrolled in non-government schools in Australia. In the year 1994-1995, the number of full-time students attending non-government schools throughout Australia increased by 17,042 (1.9%).

Some 23.6% of schools in Queensland are non-government which is slightly below the national average (ABS, 1996). The greatest proportion of non-government schools in Queensland are categorised as Catholic, which includes those operated by five diocesan Catholic Education Offices and those few that are still owned and operated by religious orders. Anglican schools, such as Thornton, make up only 5% of non-government schools in Queensland. The ABS category of ‘other’ non-government schools covers “schools with specific religious affiliations (other than Anglican and Catholic) and schools that are inter-denominational, non-denominational or which have no religious affiliation” (1996, p.11).

There has been a steady rise in enrolments in non-government schools in Queensland over the past decade, as noted in the Queensland Yearbook for 1995:

The proportion of enrolments in government schools has fallen from 71 per cent in 1983 to 68 per cent in 1993. The growth in secondary enrolments in non-government schools over this period is 35 per cent compared with 17 per cent for government schools. Catholic schools accounted for 55 per cent of total non-government secondary enrolments
in 1993. The proportions of enrolments for Anglican schools was 13 per cent and for all other denominations, 32 per cent. (ABS, p.140)

There were 73,185 students enrolled in non-government schools in 1995, with 13% of that number enrolled in Anglican schools (ABS, 1996, p.6).

The ‘independence’ enjoyed by non-government schools in Queensland is relative and dependent upon a number of variables. Because schooling is compulsory in Australia (in Queensland up to the age of 15), and students must attend schools which are properly registered with state authorities, there is a degree of supervision of all schools in Australia, whether they be government or non-government. If a non-government school receives Commonwealth funding, which almost all do, that funding is contingent on the meeting of certain prescriptive requirements set down by the Commonwealth (see note 1, chapter 3 for a discussion of funding of non-government schools).

If non-government schools wish their students to be eligible for certification with a Senior Certificate or Tertiary Entrance Statement within Queensland, they must adhere to the policies and requirements of the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies and the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority, which are responsible for issuing those certificates. Finally, although non-government schools are under no legal compunction to follow directives which the Queensland Department of Education may set down for government schooling, inevitably the pressure of any decision taken by the Department of Education is likely to force independent schools to follow a parallel path. This is particularly so with curriculum, because whereas the Department of Education has a considerable budget to be able to devote to curriculum development, non-government schools, particularly non-systemic ones such as Thornton, do not. Thus, a non-government school’s status as an ‘independent’ school is relative, and framed within a broader landscape of control and power.
APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO THORNTON STAFF

19 February 1995

Dear Thornton staff,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. My research interest is the sociology of teachers' work, in particular, issues related to teaching as a profession. My study at Thornton College will focus upon teacher autonomy and the ways in which teachers in this school perceive their role/s as teachers.

As an ethnographic study of a school, my research will use three main strategies- observation, interviews, and document analysis. I would like to interview teachers, administrators and support staff to explore their perceptions of teacher autonomy, power and control as they may exist/or not exist at Thornton. I will also be observing as much of the daily routine of school life as I am able to encounter. Therefore, inevitably, you will see me around the school with a notebook in hand! One way of making my observations more contextualised would be to shadow teachers over a few days of their working life at Thornton. Any documents connected with the way teachers work in the school will add a further dimension to the picture I am attempting to "paint" of teachers' work in this school.

Ideally I would like to interview all members of staff at Thornton, but your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Please do not hesitate to say "no" to any request I may make of you. If you do agree to be involved in any way your name will not be used in any publication that results from this research. I will do all I can to eliminate or disguise information which may make identification of individuals possible.

I will begin my work at Thornton in the next few days, and I would appreciate any assistance you can give me in getting to know your school better. I will approach each of you individually to invite you to participate in an interview or a 'shadowing' period.

I am keen to reciprocate the generosity you have shown in allowing me to work in your school. In this regard, if there is any way I may be able to help the school community, please let me know.

If you have any questions about any aspect of my work at Thornton, please don't hesitate to talk to me.

Many thanks

Carol Nicoll