PUPILS' PERCEPTIONS OF AND REACTIONS TO STRESS IN SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I have attempted to elicit pupils' constructs concerning stress and coping in school. The majority of studies in this area have not only expected pupils to orientate to the researcher's perspective; they have also tended to define stress in terms of major upheavals in pupils' lives, largely ignoring the day-to-day stressors experienced by pupils. The present study differs from past research in that it is conducted entirely from the pupils' viewpoint and examines what pupils themselves say they find stressful as well as how they say they attempt to cope.

Six classes in three, co-educational, Secondary schools in Edinburgh took part in the research. Of the 137 girls and boys in these six classes, 120 were seen in a total of 24 groups and 120 were seen individually. Of the 120 seen individually 115 had already been seen in groups. One of the six classes participated in a Pilot Study which was conducted during the pupils' second year. The remaining five classes were involved in the Main Study which spanned their second and third years.

The study is divided into four phases. As the research was conducted naturalistically Phase One deals with the lengthy Orientation Period, including the non-participant Observation Sessions, which enabled me to become part of the school setting. Phase Two is concerned with Group Conversations whilst Phase Three covers Individual
Conversations. Both types of conversation are based on Kelly's (1955) philosophy which emphasises the uniqueness of each individual and is based on the ever present possibility of change. The conversations have a focus derived from the research questions but normative responses were neither sought nor expected. Instead, personally salient issues were expected to emerge from the pupils' responses to the broad questions I posed. Phase Four involves my Attending Lessons with Selected Pupils in an attempt to discuss, with the pupils concerned, the ways in which stressful situations were coped with as they took place. The data were analysed qualitatively in an attempt to do justice to the rich variety of responses and, therefore, the findings from the thesis are illustrative rather than substantive. A thematic analysis was carried out in order to find patterns of stress which were common to the pupils. It was not my intention to look for differences between pupils on the grounds of, for example, academic ability, social class or gender. I was, however, open to the possibility of divergences between groups and was aware of the importance of noting individual exceptions.

The present thesis makes a significant contribution to the understanding of stress as perceived by pupils during their second and third years of secondary education as well as providing a detailed examination of the ways in which pupils' coping strategies are, or are not, developed during the course of one year.
CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH INTO STRESS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE
1.1 AN INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH INTO STRESS

It is not by chance that there is currently an abundance of literature on the subject of stress. While much is written with the professional in mind, there has also been a steady outpouring of material aimed quite specifically at the layperson. Indeed, books on 'stress management' have recently become big business. The very phrase 'stress management' suggests the unavoidability, the inevitability, of stress in people's lives today and courses abound in methods to harness stress so that lives can be enhanced and enriched through it. This 'bandwagon effect' (Appley, 1970) is due to the effects of living in a rapidly changing society. This has led an increasing number of people to describe themselves as being under stress, attributing to it all manner of physical and emotional disorders.

For the most part, adults have been the targeted population for these stress management schemes but if so many adults (a high percentage are parents) are experiencing the negative outcomes of stress, then their children cannot remain unaffected. This is an important point which is developed later in the present thesis.

According to Mason (1975), few advances have been made in this field over the last few decades despite the plethora of relevant work. Lack of success can largely be attributed to the problems in defining the concept rather than disagreement over the causes and probable effects. Indeed,
Dobson's (1982) search of the literature revealed over 300 definitions as well as synonyms. Stress is an 'umbrella' term readily understood by lay people. The problem begins when precision of definition is called for.

Stress, in common with other abstract concepts such as 'success', 'failure' and 'happiness', means different things to different people and even has different meanings for these same people at different times. In this chapter the term 'stress' is used in the variety of ways employed by the researchers under review. Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) compared stress with sin as both have emotional connotations but people judge them quite differently. As Mason (1975, p.86) pointed out:

The single most remarkable historical fact concerning the term 'stress' is its persistent, widespread usage in biology and medicine in spite of almost chaotic disagreement over its definition.

Neither the word, nor the problem of its meaning, is new. Stress is probably derived from the Latin stringere, to draw tight. As the Oxford English Dictionary made clear, it goes back to at least the 14th century, by which time it had already acquired several rather different meanings. It was first included in the Penguin Medical Encyclopaedia in 1921, when Wingate defined it as any influence which disturbed the homoeostasis of the body and included physical injury, deprivation, exposure, emotional disturbance and all kinds of disease within the definition. It later appeared in the Index of Psychological Abstracts in 1944. The early
appearance of the term in a medical reference book can be accounted for by the fact that the first stress research focused on the body's physiological response. Since then, substantial resources have been devoted to the study of stress by the fields of psychiatry (Coelho et al, 1974), behavioural sciences (Lazarus, 1966), clinical psychology (Korchin, 1976) and adult social medicine (Antonovsky, 1979). The types of phenomena which these writers studied have varied enormously, as have the interests they expressed in their work. Research methods were also diverse, reflecting different academic backgrounds with their individual language and terminology. The greater part of this research, regardless of discipline, was devoted to adults.

By the mid 1960s, as Cofer and Appley (1964, p.441) stated:

The word 'stress' has all but pre-empted a field previously shared by a number of other concepts including, for example, anxiety, conflict and frustration.

Continuing in this vein, they further commented (p.449):

It is as though, when the word stress came into vogue, each investigator who had been working with a concept he felt was closely related, substituted the word stress for it and continued in his same line of investigation.

Lerner (1982) suggested that it may be the very fuzziness of the concept that makes it so appealing but this undoubtedly adds to the confusion. In any case, because of the lack of full understanding of the mechanisms involved it has not been possible to agree on which term, or terms, should
replace it. It would certainly be easier if it were accepted that there are several different definitions of stress which, as long as they remain consistent and logical and cannot be faulted on theoretical grounds, may add something new to what has already been discovered. Nevertheless, there remains the idea that there is somewhere a fool-proof definition waiting to be discovered. As Spielberger and Sarason (1978, p.10-11) put it:

> The hope for the perfect stress test arises from the expectancy that there should be in the body, an absolute non-specific (i.e. a specifically non-specific) modification that could always be relied upon to measure the level of stress.

This hope is in keeping with the traditional view of science which is to proceed by reduction until a perfect solution is found. The term stress, however, runs counter to this reductionism, and has a tendency to integrate and bring together possible common causes of diverse outcomes.

At one time the word stress was used to identify both the stimulus and the response. As the concept evolved, new terms had to be coined to distinguish between its different elements. Hence, Selye (1974) spoke of situations, events or people who produce the stress reactions as 'stressors' and the state of the organism, according to Pepitone (1967), is 'stress'. These terms are understood in the same way in the present thesis.

Three basic approaches to research into stress can be
distinguished. The first has a physiological bias, seeing stress in terms of the stimulus characteristics of disturbing or noxious environments and is, therefore, an independent variable. The second takes a behavioural approach and treats stress as a dependent variable, describing it in terms of the individual's response to disturbing or noxious environments. The third strategy, and the one adopted in this thesis, regards stress as an intervening variable and describes it as the reflection of a 'lack of fit' between the individual and the environment (Mason, 1975). In this subjective and transactional approach, stress is studied in terms of its antecedent factors and its effects and is seen as a personal phenomenon. In all three approaches, which will now be considered in more detail, the word 'environment' is used in its widest sense to include the internal, external, physiological and psychological environments of the individual.

1.2 STRESS AS A STIMULUS

In research which regards stress as a stimulus the view is taken that stress is an objective demand on the individual. It is considered to be inherent in certain situations, in certain tasks and in certain stimuli. Basic to this view is the belief that there are many identifiable stimuli which, if experienced, invariably result in stress. This definition uses the engineering parallel in which external stressors give rise to a stress reaction within the individual. As a result of examining different sorts of situations Weitz
(1970) identified eight that could be classified as stressful. These included noxious environmental stimuli, perceived threat, speeded information processing, disrupted physiological function, confinement and isolation, blocking, frustration and group pressure. To this list Frankenhaeuser (1975) added lack of control over events and Zegans (1982) later included lack of stimulus, expected stimulation deficit, overstimulation, boredom and fatigue.

Stress, however, cannot simply be defined exclusively by situations because the capacity of any situation to produce stress reactions is dependent on characteristics particular to the individual and what may be immobilisingly stressful to one may simply be an enjoyable challenge to another. In any case, according to Kelly, as quoted by Bannister and Fransella (1986), no one responds to a stimulus, only to the interpretation of that stimulus and this, in turn, depends on the sorts of personal constructs the individual uses to understand the world. Furthermore, bearing in mind the importance of individual responses, this approach requires a way of measuring properties within the stimulus or situation so as to establish, qualitatively, the degree of stress inherent in different situations. Without such measurement it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop a stimulus-based definition of stress that unifies a range of types of situation other than arbitrarily.
1.3 STRESS AS A RESPONSE

This approach has proved to be more enduring than that favoured by those who view stress as a stimulus. From this position, stress is taken to be a dependent variable and there is emphasis on the body's reaction to the stressor.

Much of the early research work focused on the physiological responses to stress and in 1929 Cannon described the flight-fight syndrome which involves the activation of the sympathetic adrenal medullary system in emergency situations. This formed the basis of Selye's research work which began in the 1930s and he introduced the term stress to the life sciences in 1936 (Appley and Trumbull, 1967). His work is essentially physiological in nature with particular emphasis on endocrine functions. According to Selye (1976, p.13):

> Stress is the non specific response of the body to any demand made upon it.

He posited that this non-specific response is always the same regardless of the specific activity that causes the rise in requirements. What varies is the degree of response which, in turn, depends only on the intensity of the demand for adjustment. Selye (1956) named this response to stress the 'General Adaptation Syndrome' (GAS). In addition to GAS, Selye claimed, there develops in tissues more directly affected by stress, a local adaptation syndrome (LAS) which gives rise to diseases of adaptation such as coronary heart disease and ulcers.
From this definition of stress, if a condition in the physical environment acts as a stressor, its initial impact should result in arousal. No mention, however, is made of the fact that adaptation may take place after the first alarm period stage (Glass and Singer, 1972), or that there may be a progressive move to a new and higher level of physiological output (Davis, 1971). In addition, McGrath (1970) explained that if any situation which results in a particular response pattern is to be considered stressful it will be necessary to include such activities as physical exercise, the various emotions, fasting and fatigue and this may not be generally acceptable. Another weakness arises because all the symptoms in the syndrome do not necessarily occur together. The failure of an individual to display what are assumed to be signs of stress when confronted with a presumably stressful stimulus may suggest either that the stimulus was not really stressful or that the responses being assessed were not invariant indicators of stress even though the stimulus may actually have been stressful to the person.

As Pancheri and Benaissa (1978) pointed out, the stress response in this definition by Selye is of a physical reaction to diverse stimuli which are very intense and sometimes physically dangerous. These extreme situations are unlikely to be everyday occurrences where the emphasis is less on physical survival and more on a culturally defined idea of survival. New values have been identified
as necessary for survival and part of the non-specific response is unnecessarily elicited. The climate of competition in which the twin goals of power and money are the criteria of success are part of today's stressors which produce the physiological response of preparing the body for physical activity. Although the body's response pattern is the same regardless of whether the stimuli are physiological or psychological, the meanings the individual attributes to these different stimuli may be quite different. The degree of ambiguity inherent in this approach is likely to stand in the way of advances in distinguishing relationships between stressful stimuli and their impact on the individual. Response-oriented views of stress, therefore, have severe limitations and cannot be accepted as a total definition of stress.

1.4 STRESS AS AN INTERACTION

While early studies tended to examine the relationship between stress as a noxious stimulus and some disease or discomfort as a response, the limitations of this simplistic two-variable design became increasingly apparent (Coyne and Lazarus, 1980; Jenkins, 1979) and a third strategy began to gain popularity. This third approach, and that adopted in this thesis, defines stress as an intervening variable and expresses the view that stress arises through the existence of a particular relationship between the person and the environment. This relationship, it is argued here, is based upon the personal construct systems (Kelly, 1955) which
people use as scaffolding to predict, control and thus make sense of their particular world. From this position (unlike the first two which view the human organism as passive and acted upon firstly by external forces and secondly by internal forces), the individual is regarded as a constant source of motion ever reaching towards the future through the doorway of the present.

Unlike the situation and response based approaches the interaction model does not hold with the notion that there should be an objective list of stress stimuli because, as Haan (1982, p.256) made clear:

Stress is the result of a situation having a certain meaning.

This meaning is shaped by a person's vision of the universe and is peculiar to the individual, being determined by the personal construct system. Visions, and therefore their meanings, it must be emphasised, can be changed (reconstrued) and shared with others as Kelly (1955, p.95) described in his sociality corollary:

To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person.

In 1966, Lazarus introduced the psychological component to stress research suggesting that the individual's perception of threat might determine whether a given noxious stimulus could produce stress reaction effects. He suggested that different psychological stimuli could lead to similar stress
responses thereby providing a psychological parallel to the physiological response postulated by Selye (1956). Lazarus (1966; 1976) saw perceived threat to a person's most important values or goals as a central characteristic of stressful situations. Similarly, in construct theory terms, Kelly (1955, p.489) described threat as:

The awareness of imminent comprehensive change in one's core role structure.

Cox et al (1978) endorsed this view that stress is part of a complex and dynamic system of transaction between the person and the environment. They underlined that stress is an individual perceptual phenomenon rooted in psychological processes and drew attention to the feedback components of the system. The existence and importance of these feedback components mean that the system is cyclical rather than linear. Five stages can be recognised in this system. The first is represented by the sources of demand relating to the person and is part of the individual's internal or external environment. The next is represented by the individual's perception of the demand and a personal ability to cope. The third involves changes in physiological states and cognitive behavioural attempts to reduce the stressful nature of the demand. These are responses to stress, or methods of coping. The fourth phase concerns the consequences of the coping responses. The actual as well as the perceived consequences are important. The final stage involves feedback which occurs at all other stages in the stress system and which is effective in shaping the outcome at each of these stages.
What is not made clear in any of the theories mentioned so far is the fact that people are at all times free to reinterpret their perceptions of and reactions to stress. As Kelly (1963, p.2) put it:

Man is always free to reconstrue that which he may not deny.

Although events from the past will exercise control over people's behaviour today, they need not act as shackles on their lives compelling them to repeat yesterday's mistakes tomorrow. Undoubtedly the system for dealing with stress is cyclical as opposed to linear, but this is not a once-and-for-all cycle, forever repeating itself. In accordance with the theory of personal constructs, this cycle is viewed as a process, an on-going activity. Kelly (1963, p.8) made this quite clear when he explained:

Because man can represent his environment, he can place alternative constructions upon it, and indeed, do something about it if it doesn't suit him. To the living creature, the universe is real, but it is not inexorable unless he chooses to construe it that way.

Such knowledge has the power to bring freedom and joy to people's lives and when individuals are able to identify themselves with their construct systems and can make them work, they can experience personal control. As Kelly (1963, p.131) stated:

When the person begins to use himself as a datum in forming constructs, exciting things begin to happen.
Although research into stress has, in the main, been focused on adults, a number of studies, mostly American, has been conducted with children. However, an important impediment to the understanding of stress in children lies in the unwarranted assumption that children actually experience the degree and quality of responses to stress that adults assume they do. Therefore, numerous measures of child and adolescent stress have been patterned to a great extent on the adult measures. Among these measures are those by Coddington (1972), Brand and Johnson (1982) and Johnson (1986). The best known is perhaps the Life Events Record developed by Coddington (1972). It provides only an overall measure of life change and makes no distinction between positive and negative changes. The reasons for this are unclear but may relate to the nature of life stress measures that have been used. The Coddington scale, however, appears to be the only one that is reasonably well supported by research data. Yeaworth et al (1980) developed a measure that employs a life change unit approach to assessment, using a 31 item scale composed of events deemed appropriate for an adolescent population. Unlike the Coddington measure, life change units in Yeaworth's measure were derived by having adolescents themselves rate events rather than relying on estimated readjustments provided by adults. As with other similar scales no validity or reliability data have been reported. Tolor et al (1983) developed the High
School Social Readjustment scale specifically for use with adolescents. Estimates of the amount of readjustment associated with each of the 52 events included in the scale were derived by obtaining ratings from 215 psychologists, 67 elementary and high school teachers and 65 high school students. It was noted that each of these groups was quite similar in terms of their rank ordering of stressful events. Johnson and McCutcheon (1980) developed the Life Events Checklist for use with older children and adolescents. It consists of 46 events along with spaces to report events not specifically listed. Another measure used is the Junior High Life Experiences Survey (JHLES) developed by Swearingen and Cohen (1985). There are 39 items and spaces to include events not listed.

Life change unit scales, such as those described above, have been the most widely used methods of assessing life stress in children and adolescents. Probably as many as 90% of all child life stress studies have employed measures of this type and have concentrated on quite distinct and disruptive events as perceived and generally rated by adults. However, the fact that children vary in their appraisal of events and in terms of whether specific transactions are seen as positive or negative makes it unlikely that life change unit scores will provide an adequate index of the actual impact of specific events on a given child. Lists of events for scales have typically been derived from each author's experience with children with no attempt being made to find out which events children actually experience as stressful.
A self-rating procedure is likely to provide for the assessment of a broader range of events, especially those that are most likely to be viewed differently by individuals. However, self-report instruments also have their drawbacks and it has been well documented that factors such as acquiescence and social desirability are embedded in responses to such instruments. It is assumed that acquiescence is a response to stress associated with self-disclosure conditions while social desirability is primarily a response to stress associated with content (Fiske and Pearson, 1970; Wiggins, 1968). Children's earlier stressful school experiences may contribute to their reactions to the self-reporting process. For example, if they have encountered stress which is mainly of an interpersonal nature, they may well be extremely sensitive to the threat which is part of the subject-role and demand qualities of the self-reporting situation. Conversely, if stress has focused on the academic aspects of school, they may respond badly to what they construe as the negative self-evaluation of so many self-report instruments.

In common with the numerous instruments used to measures stress in young people, many intervention programmes designed for children are not necessarily from the child's perceptions and reactions, but from adult projections of them. Yamamoto (1979) attempted to ascertain whether children evaluate their experiences of stress in the same terms as adults perceive them. Children in fourth, fifth and sixth grade were asked to rate 20 life events on a seven
point scale which was drawn up from the literature and from class teachers' suggestions. Although the findings showed no statistically significant differences in relation to sex, grade or individual experience, the children's perceptions of stress frequently differed from adult expectations. More traumatic than had been anticipated were 'a poor report card' 'being sent to the principal' 'getting lost' 'being ridiculed in class' 'not making 100' or 'being picked last on a team'. This enormous stumbling block to understanding stress in children was appreciated by Anthony (1974, p.106) who explained:

Stress as experienced by a child and stress as estimated by the adult observing the impact of the stress on the child are frequently of very different orders of magnitude.

Lists, scales, measures and questionnaires compiled by the researcher give the pupils 'clues' about the type of answers being sought. Even where spaces are left for pupils to include events not listed, there is a tendency for responses to correspond with those supplied by the researcher.

Ridding their lives of stress would not necessarily be in the best interests of children, even if it were possible to do so. With stress, as with most things in life, the secret is moderation and balance (Hambly, 1983). Stress can enable children to handle successfully their various daily transactions and this becomes an important source of self-confirmation, an indication of self-control and personal power. To deny children these opportunities, in a caring structured environment, may not only lead to emotional
maladaptation, but also to physical illness. Indeed, for some time credence has been given to the view that the state of mind can affect health and considerable research has been carried out to demonstrate the connection between stress and the aetiology of disease.

1.6 STRESS AND HEALTH

Selye (1977) maintained that all activity mobilises the individual's stress mechanism but which part of the body will be affected depends on accidental conditioning factors. According to this theory the weakest link in the body's 'chain' breaks down under stress although all parts are equally exposed to it. Jemmott and Locke (1984) suggested that experiencing stress can affect the body's immuno-competence, so rendering the individual more susceptible to a range of health risks. Each disease results in a degree of stress and, in turn, stress has a part in the development of each disease. Indeed, according to Spielberger and Sarason (1978) it may only be disease or dysfunction which shows individuals that they are under stress, as the psychological effects may be less obvious than the particular aspects of the body's reaction.

In common with other areas of research into stress most of the work concerning health has concentrated on adults. One of the earliest systematic attempts to quantify the degree of stress experienced in life events and to demonstrate the effects of those events was compiled by Holmes and Rahe
in their Schedule of Recent Life Experiences (SRE). Subsequent research criticised Holmes' and Rahe's (1967) position as they had rated events according to the degree of life change involved with no distinction being made between pleasant and unpleasant changes (Vinokur and Selzer, 1975). Paykel (1974) and Gersten et al (1974) demonstrated that ill health has largely been confined to unpleasant or undesirable life change events. Almost all the research which has been conducted with children has concentrated on major upheavals and disregarded the day-to-day problems with which school children have to cope. Several studies have examined the ways in which accident rates increase during stressful life changes (Padilla et al, 1976). Others have looked at the relationship between life changes and general illness indicators (Beautrais et al, 1982), while others have examined life change and the onset of specific health problems (Meyer and Haggerty, 1962). Still others have been concerned with the relationship between life changes and health status in children with chronic illnesses of various types (Heisel et al, 1973). Coddington and Troxell (1980) documented the life stress scores of 114 High School football players over a 12 month period and studied them during the subsequent football season to determine the frequency of their athletics injuries. Bramwell et al (1975) found that major injuries were connected with high levels of life events experienced among college football players. Boyce et al (1973) provided data regarding the
relationship between life stress and childhood illness. High level of routine was linked with increased severity of illness while duration of illness was connected with high levels of stress. Cohen-Sandler et al (1982) established a connection between life stress and child and adolescent suicide behaviour. These children were found to have experienced significantly higher levels of overall life change than those in either the depressed or psychiatric groups. Coddington (1979) gathered evidence to suggest links between stress and teenage pregnancy. It was found that pregnant girls were more likely than non-pregnant girls to report incidents of illness or death of a parent or grandparent or parental separation. Johnson (1986) suggested that one effect of stress might be a reduction of parental or personal vigilance which leads to ignoring relevant environmental cues which ordinarily would help prevent many mishaps. It may well be in the interests of both patients and doctors to regard illness, both physical and mental, not so much as something simply to be cured but as a personal experience and something with its own lessons to be understood and learned (Bannister, 1985).

Many of the above mentioned findings can be considered to be lacking on conceptual grounds and methodology. Most of the studies have been correlational making it impossible to make inferences about causality. Many findings have been limited because the studies have failed to consider that stress has different effects on different individuals.
Kessler (1979) stated that, despite a wealth of research over several decades, there is still only limited information about whether stress causes ill health. This limited progress is very much due to the fact that, for ethical reasons, experimental investigations of major stress effects cannot be carried out on human beings. Even if it can be assumed that there is a causal relationship between stress and health problems, it is of little significance when considering the child and adolescent populations as a whole. The reason for this is unclear but may relate to the nature of the stress measures used. Another reason might be that young people experience stressors other than those usually reflected in adult-determined life change measures. For example, with one notable exception (see Compas et al. 1985) child and adolescent life change measures fail to assess the many frequently occurring day-to-day stressors such as peer pressure, negative interactions with teachers and conflict with parents. In addition, physical handicap and chronic health problems are generally disregarded. Many of these problems constitute low grade, chronic stress, which can cause long term physiological, emotional and/or interpersonal problems. Beehr and Bhagat (1985) documented findings suggesting that chronic situations are more powerful predictors of stress related outcomes than are short-lived stressful episodes. Lazarus (1978) described these low-key conditions of stress as 'daily hassles' and, in aggregate, they can have a profound effect on the individual. With these mild to moderate levels of stress people may never get a very clear message. Rather, they may
continue through their daily lives feeling just a little under the weather, just slightly uncomfortable, only just aware that they have not enjoyed themselves much lately and that they are not getting as much out of life as they would like. Indeed, these responses to stress may become so much part of people's lives, that they continue to respond, out of habit, to transactions which have long since passed. Lazarus (1983) described 'daily uplifts' which are the counterpart of chronic stressors and which have been found to be effective in predicting stress outcomes. For example, an encouraging remark can have such a pleasurable effect that it contributes to the individual's overall sense of emotional well-being on a daily basis. This 'ripple effect' of hassles and uplifts indicates the need to explore the temporal dynamics of stress.

1.7 STRESS AND TEMPORAL PARAMETERS

A most important aspect of the present thesis is the view that human life is characterised, not only by the fact that it can be abstracted along a time line but, more especially, by the living organism's ability to represent its environment. This environment, like the universe, is changing all the time; there is no standing still. It naturally follows, therefore, that research into stress must be considered within temporal parameters.

Weick (1970) pointed out that the occurrence of a potentially stress inducing situation is always a temporally
localised event within an on-going organism-behaviour-environment context and that its meaning, as well as responses to it, depend in part on what has been going on at the time. Thus, not only must the temporal 'stream' (involving the stress inducing events and reactions to them) be taken into account in understanding the occurrence, effects and consequences of stress, but also the temporally simultaneous, surrounding context.

However, not only must all aspects of the present situation be considered but, as Rutter (1980) made clear, it is also necessary to examine the person's history and the effects of stressful events on the developmental process and on subsequent functioning. This, of course, is extremely difficult because of the problem of separating the effects of early events from those of later events; not surprisingly, the two tend to be intertwined. Early events may operate through their action in altering sensitivities to stress or in modifying styles of coping which then protect or predispose towards disorder in later life. Rutter (1983) termed the former 'steeling' and the latter 'sensitising'. In all probability, it will not be the number of stressful situations encountered that will determine whether 'steeling' or 'sensitising' occurs but rather whether the attempt to cope was successful or a humiliating failure.

Magnusson and Ekehamer (1975, 1978) also noted the importance of temporal aspects and stated that people may
cope with a situation on one occasion by withdrawing but they may deal with the same situation at another time by attacking. For this reason, Mechanic (1978) did not believe it was fruitful to examine only those stimuli which are perceived as stressful or harmful; more basic to his concern were the varying contingencies under which the same stimulus may either arouse fear and threaten harm or appear benevolent. In personal construct terms these different responses to the same situation can be explained by describing the individual as looking through different templates or patterns to anticipate or predict the event (Kelly, 1955). In other words, the situation has been reconstrued and is now a different situation.

It is necessary to bear in mind that all events are multidimensional and multifaceted. Various contextual and motivational variables may mediate the relationship between perception and reaction, in addition to the specific situation. For instance, a stressor might be of a type with which the individual could normally cope effectively but which is too much when added to other concurrent demands or to a load which could normally be handled but which is beyond the individual's momentary capability because of a temporary depletion of normal resources. These notions raise interesting questions about long and short term overload and temporal factors in general, as well as variations in a person's capability regardless of any change in the source of stress.
It appears incorrect to assume that individuals use the same coping strategies in dealing with all aspects of a particular situation. Cohen et al (1986) demonstrated that different modes of coping are used in dealing with different strata of a stressful situation and at different stages of a stressful encounter. Several research studies have shown that there may be changes in individual coping modes during different periods of a stressful life situation (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). Emphasis on cumulative stressful transactions relates to the common assumption that when increased numbers of stressful events are experienced within a relatively short period of time, the person's coping ability is most severely taxed and there is an increased risk of developing health related problems (Holmes and Rahe, 1967).

The concept of time helps in distinguishing between coping and adaptive skills. The former demands mobilisation of new resources when confronted with an acute, situationally determined, stressful event, while the latter concerns coping and adaptive skills that require continuous monitoring of various kinds of resources when confronted with a gradually developing stressful event (Beehr and Bhagat, 1985). Short and long term outcomes may also be quite different. An analysis of 26 studies by Mullen and Suls (1982) examined avoidant and vigilant coping strategies in relation to measures of physical adaptation and concluded that avoidant strategies resulted in better adaptation when short term outcomes were examined; whereas vigilant
strategies were associated with better outcomes when long term outcomes were examined.

Fisher (1984) suggested that people are poor at providing reliable estimates of event frequency and Howell and Burnett (1978) and Marques and Howell (1979) described the existence of 'generator bias' to identify how subjects give their overall frequency estimates. It was found that when people consider they cannot cope with particular events they tend to over-represent the number of times these events occur as well as the mistakes they make. Beck (1970) considered that depressed individuals could be seen as having a pessimistic 'generator bias' because they generally undervalue their own capabilities.

An important relationship within the notion that coping takes place as a process through time concerns the interval between the onset of cues leading to the anticipation of forthcoming stressful encounters and the actual onset of these encounters. The work of Nomikos et al (1968) revealed that even very small differences in that interval may affect the efficiency of coping. Another important temporal relation within the coping process is the interval between demand-response and the anticipated onset of the consequences. When the confrontation is in the future, the 'warning period' provides an opportunity to consider and prepare coping strategies; but when an activity is separated in time from the consequences of that activity it is more difficult to encourage the development of preventive
patterns (Weick, 1970).

In a similar vein, it is recognised that when there is a considerable gap between the stressful event and its recall, then the reliability of recall will deteriorate over time and, therefore, retrospective reporting can have limitations. For instance, Jenkins et al. (1979) found that stress scores dropped by between 34% and 46% when respondents were asked to report events nine months after the original reporting. Uhlenhuth et al. (1977) suggested that reports of life events decline with time, decreasing at a rate of about 5% per month over an 18 month period. In addition they found decreased reporting of events that were beyond the person's control occurred at an even faster rate. However, Thoits (1983) noted that several studies had suggested adequate reliability of recall over periods as long as one year. Perhaps this discrepancy in findings can be accounted for by the fact that those studies showing the best reliability of recall over time were based on reports of stressful events by interviews whereas those showing limited recall involved the use of self report life event measures.

Temporal parameters are most important in research into stress. It is necessary to explore the temporal dynamics of stress, the temporal aspects of demand, the temporal variations in capabilities, the temporal requirements for response, the temporal artifacts of measures and, above all, the crucial temporal features of the coping process.
In addition to the temporal aspects of stress and coping the variables which mediate the effects of stress must be considered. Indeed, a most important observation regarding the effects of stress must be that one person may become ill, whilst another may not only remain healthy, but flourish in the face of the same (apparently) stressful situation. The question arising, therefore, from this observation must concern the identity of the factors that mediate the impact of stress on the individual.

1.8 MEDIATORS OF STRESS

Attempts have been made to identify and classify the variables which act as mediators of stress. Jenkins (1979) examined the different capabilities of individuals to adapt to specific kinds of stressors. He compared their psychosocial adaptive capacities to the 'host resistance' of medicine and considered that ego-strength, problem-solving ability, flexibility and social skills are the psychological counterparts to host resistance. Antonovsky (1974), in a similar way, identified the mediating factors between life crises and health as 'resistance resources'. Zautra and Beier (1978) spoke of a 'personal quality' which reflected, among other things, self satisfaction. They also investigated the role of social conditions and perceived quality of life on the part of the individual in ameliorating the debilitating effects of stress by facilitating adjustment. Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1974)
classified the mediating variables into psychological, physiological and social. House (1981) gave a useful breakdown of social support into the emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal aspects. A supportive person may help people to decrease their emotional arousal, reduce the strength of the stressors or provide the comfort which help people to feel less anxious because they are not alone. This decrease in emotional arousal may then inhibit physiological mechanisms and reduce physical damage to, for example, the heart, arteries and kidneys. In the long run this may protect the immune system, which is increasingly believed to be suppressed by stress (Cooper, 1984). Informational support may, at the action stage, help to improve decision making and instrumental support may help to allow decisions to be implemented by providing practical assistance. Appraisal support may help at the outcome of the above process by providing realistic feedback on the efficiency of the actions taken and the person's role in putting these actions into effect. With much social support a stressful situation may be turned into a developmental opportunity; the interaction thus changing the nature of the psychological situation.

Rutter (1981) pointed out that the personal qualities and characteristics that an individual brings to the stress interaction are likely to be important. He lists such variables as age, sex, genetic factors, temperament, intelligence and problem-solving skills as being relevant
and went on to discuss the importance of social group identity and cognitive appraisal as factors which mitigate the effects of stress. Rabkin and Struening (1976, p.1018) echoed Rutter's views and summarised the individual characteristics as follows:

The effects of most personal variables in mediating stressful conditions are fairly obvious; persons with more skills, assets and resources and with more versatile defences and broader experience tend to fare better. In general, the more competence individuals have demonstrated in the past, the more likely it is that they will cope adaptively with a current stressor.

The above authors additionally considered personality type to be an important variable but while several other authors have also suggested that personality type is important, few specify the actual traits that might be relevant. The one major exception on which there is some agreement seems to involve the type A and type B personalities. Friedman and Rosenman (1974) classified people according to their behaviour as Type A or Type B personalities. Type A persons are those whose behaviour is characterised by the urgency of time pressure, excessive competitive drive or undue hostility when threatened whilst Type B people are characterised as being less stressed, less competitive, less abrasive and relatively free of a frantic sense of time urgency. Glass (1977) found Type A college students to be more ambitious. Treadmill tests showed that type A men pushed themselves harder and suppressed feelings of fatigue. They worked closer to limits of endurance and when they were defeated in spite of their efforts, they experienced the
loss of control as more threatening. Indeed, when the loss was severe, they became more vulnerable to a helpless response than Type B individuals. Fontana and Dovidio (1984) provided data suggesting that increased levels of life change may have an adverse impact on an adolescent's performance in school. Types A and B were considered and no overall differences were found on any of the school-related measures. Differences were found, however, between either the total level of life stress experienced, grade point average or the degree of the pupil's involvement in sports. In Type A individuals there was a correlation between increased levels of life change and number of absences from school. In Type B people there was a significant negative relationship between life stress and grade point average and sports involvement and a significant positive relationship between life stress and delinquent behaviour. No difference was found between which events might be controlled and those which might not. Type B individuals were most affected academically by cumulative life changes.

Christensen (1981), in discussing mediating variables, pointed to the key role of individual perception as important in determining the impact of stress; in particular the importance of the amount of perceived control over events. Wills and Langner (1980) argued that low self-esteem and incompetence are directly linked to a lack of personal control over life events and are powerful variables influencing the stressfulness of those events. It has been shown that when stressors seem to be outside people's
control they are perceived as being even more stressful (Lefcourt, 1973). Conversely, the perceptions of personal control over events have been found to reduce the amount of anxiety associated with them (Seligman, 1975). The actual control of the environment, therefore, may be largely irrelevant as it is the subjective sense of control that is important. When people are placed in situations where stressors occur unpredictably and outside their control the result is feelings of helplessness, incompetence, frustration, depression, anxiety and fatigue (Miller and Norman, 1979).

Rotter (1966, 1975) did much to promote interest in the construct of 'locus of control' which has been found to be a mediator of adaptive functioning in children. For example, 'internal' children, when compared with 'external' children, have been found to show greater academic achievement, higher self-esteem, less anxiety, less emotional maladjustment, greater persistence, greater ability to evaluate and use new information and a sense of mastery (Gordon et al, 1981; Joe, 1971; Phares, 1976; Nowicki and Strickland, 1973). Closely related to the sense of mastery is the construct of competence. White (1963) defined competence as the individual's existing capacity to interact effectively with the environment. It depends on an accumulation of interactions and, therefore, is related to previous experience. In the present thesis experience is seen in construct theory terms as detailed by Kelly (1955, p.72) in his experience corollary:
a person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replications of events.

From this position it can be understood that it is not what happens around people which makes them experienced and that simply having lived through an event does not constitute having experienced it. People must successively construe and reconstrue events as they happen in order to gain experience and enrich their lives.

Hinkle (1974) noted that people who seem most immune to stress have an almost 'sociopathic' flavour to their personalities. This means that they appear to have a shallow attachment to people, goals or groups and that they readily shift to other relationships when established ones are disrupted. Many of these people seem to have an accurate awareness of their own needs and limitations and avoid situations that make demands on them that they do not want or feel that they cannot meet. Studies suggest that healthy personality involves a somewhat unrealistic optimism and an exaggerated view of the self's own capacities, whereas depressed people seem to have a more accurate view of their own strengths and especially weaknesses (as judged by others) (Alloy and Abramson, 1979; Lewisohn et al, 1980).

There is evidence that social organisational factors influence behaviour in childhood (Rutter et al, 1979). Findings show that schools vary markedly in rates of disruptive behaviour and absenteeism and these variations
are characteristics of the schools themselves. The above authors went on to conclude that this suggests that schools can be a force for good (or bad) even with children living under conditions of psychosocial disadvantage. That is not the same, however, as saying that it is the effect of the social group that modifies the children's response to stress.

Factors which can be inert on their own may serve as catalysts when combined with acute stressors of some type. If the catalytic variables tend to increase the effect of stressors they may be called 'vulnerability variables' (Brown and Harris, 1978) and when they tend to reduce the effect of stressors they have been termed 'protective' factors (Rutter, 1979). Children with a potential for mental disorder which fails to be actualised can provide clues to 'protective' factors that enhance resilience in both normal and high risk children (Bleuler, 1978; Garmezy, 1981; Nuechterlein, 1983). There would appear to be a group of protective factors for children; dispositional attributes in the child, family cohesion and warmth, and support figures in the environment and in schools who serve as role models for the child.

Variables which moderate the impact of stress will also affect the coping behaviours used by the individual. Coping processes in terms of active problem solving are highly influential, but empirical data on the actual importance of coping mechanisms are still lacking (Rutter, 1981). Lazarus
and Launier (1978, p.308) suggested that:

...the ways people cope with stress (may be) even more important to overall morale, social functioning and health/illness, than the frequency and severity of episodes of stress themselves.

As the present study is very much concerned with the development of coping strategies, these will now be considered in greater detail.

1.9 STRESS AND COPING

In the study of coping there is frequently discomfort with the imprecision of definition. There has been a lack of systematic categorisation of coping methods, accompanied by a trend toward over-inclusiveness in which all responses to a stressful event are defined as coping responses. Although coping is a relative latecomer to the domain of research into stress there has been a rapid escalation of related studies including: coping patterns in response to a variety of stressors (Coyne and Lazarus, 1980; Silver and Wortman, 1980), factors that reflect risk and vulnerability to various types of behaviour disorders (Glesser et al, 1981; Regier and Allen, 1981) and protective factors that may account for resilience and adaptation in the presence of severely threatening events (Baruch and Barnett, 1980; Werner and Smith, 1982).

Coping has been defined by Cohen and Lazarus (1979, p.311) as:
Efforts both action-oriented and intrapsychic, to manage (that is, master, tolerate, reduce, minimise) environmental and internal demands, and conflicts among them, which tax or exceed a person's resources.

This definition is intended to be broad, including within it both effective and ineffective strategies that other investigators have studied separately (for example, Haan 1963, 1969, 1977; Kroebner, 1963).

Coping may serve one of two purposes, either problem-solving or emotion-regulation (Hamburg et al, 1974; Lazarus, 1975). Problem-solving behaviours involve dealing with either internal or external environmental demands that create threat. Emotion-regulating behaviours include attempts to modify the distress that accompanies threat, for example, by denying that the threat exists. Folkman and Lazarus' (1980) 'Ways of Coping Scale' and Billings and Moos' (1981) 'Coping Scheme', have been used to differentiate between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) considered three purposes of coping and made a separate distinction between strategies which control the meaning of the situation and those which control the emotional response itself (see also Moos and Billings 1982). A distinction between emotion regulation and problem solving styles of coping, however, is not always easy to make, since a similar behaviour can serve several purposes. Folkman et al (1986) suggested that it may be necessary to know the context before being able to distinguish which function a coping strategy serves. Most people use both types of
strategies simultaneously. In a study of a community sample of middle aged women and men Folkman and Lazarus (1980) found that both styles were used in 98% of the episodes.

Various attempts have been made to classify the different types of coping behaviours. Haan (1963, 1969) made a distinction between coping processes (which are regarded as healthy, reality-oriented and conscious), defence strategies (which are viewed as rigid, distorting and involving unconscious elements) and fragmentary mechanisms (which are repetitive, unresponsive to requirements and determined by emotional needs). Lazarus and Launier (1978) and Roskies and Lazarus (1980) proposed a classification based, first, on whether the purpose is to change the troubled person-environment transaction, or to regulate emotion (that is, problem solving or palliation) and based, secondly, on the coping style used. The coping styles are sub-divided into information seeking, direct action (either on the self or the environment), inhibition of action, various intrapsychic processes and turning to others for support (Cohen and Lazarus, 1979, 1983). Coping scales, however, vary in terms of how many of these mechanisms are assessed. Some examine only intrapsychic processes (Glesser and Ihilevich, 1969), or a limited number of mechanisms (Stone and Neale, 1984).

Before coping can be implemented the stressful situation must be assessed and this takes the form of primary and secondary appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Primary
appraisal refers to the cognitive processes of evaluating the significance of an encounter for the person's well-being, answering the question, "Am I all right, or in trouble?" It takes one of three forms: judgements that the situation is either irrelevant, benign-positive or stressful. Secondary appraisal answers the question posed in primary appraisal, "What can I do about it?" It concerns the individual's appraisal of the inner resources available for dealing with threatening or challenging situations, unlike primary appraisal which concerns the relevance of environmental events in relation to the person's well-being. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued, primary appraisal has to do with what is at stake and secondary appraisal with what can be accomplished. They (1984, p.35) posited that secondary appraisal involves:

a complex evaluative process that takes into account which coping options are available, the likelihood that a given coping option will accomplish what it is supposed to, and the likelihood that one can apply a particular strategy or set of strategies effectively.

Both primary and secondary appraisals are on-going and encounters can be reappraised on the basis of new information. A strong sense of self-worth, which is secondary appraisal, can encourage the person to assess situations as being benign or irrelevant that would otherwise be threatening and vice versa. Secondary appraisal processes in naturalistic stress transactions are likely to prove rather complex. Secondary appraisal must involve balancing competing concerns as the person
simultaneously, or sequentially, evaluates personal and social resources that can be mobilised, the adequacy of alternative coping strategies and feedback from coping efforts. The options are rarely clear-cut and as the person's perspective shifts from one transaction to another, priorities determining coping may be altered radically. Information processing under such circumstances is most selective and influenced by the individual's primary appraisals, emotional state and personal agendas.

Steiner (1970) showed that, depending on the individual's priorities, coping methods can serve either to avoid the stressor or to mitigate its consequences. One method, under-recall of the amount of disagreement, seems to be a technique for preventing stress by denying the occurrence of what would be a stressful encounter. In construct theory terms this is described as hostility and represents a desperate effort to maintain a personally important position by refusing to accept evidence which seems to invalidate that position. The other three coping methods, conforming, rejection and devaluation of the issue, all seem to be techniques for preventing the stress, not by preventing the stress inducing-condition of disagreement but by preventing the occurrence of the normal consequences (dissonance) of such disagreement. As in the case of Festinger's (1957, 1958) theory of Cognitive Dissonance, change in attitudes following either decision choices, forced compliance or exposure to threatening information, are seen within the context of coping with the discomfort (or stress) resulting
from conflicting or incompatible cognitions. Hoffman (1957) contended that persistent conformity may be a device for avoiding stress rather than a response to it. People who have learned to rely upon conformity, rejection, under-recall or devaluation are presumably less threatened by dissonant messages. However, it is unlikely that these responses will, in the long term, lead to elaboration of the individual's construct system.

Some coping processes may actually increase the risk of disorder or maladaptation, while others may improve adaptation and reduce the risks of a negative outcome (Lazarus et al, 1980). Hence, a further dimension in the study of coping is between effective and ineffective strategies. The problem here is how to conceptualise, let alone measure, effectiveness in coping. Solving the problem cannot be the criterion used as some problems do not admit of a solution. Resolution of conflict cannot be the criterion used because conflict may be resolved in ways which are profoundly damaging to health or social functioning.

It is clear that there can be no one (or even several) most successful coping strategy. The mode which is most effective is likely to vary with the type of stress and with the circumstances. However, it may be the case that some strategies are better suited to one person than another. Within a very broad range, perhaps it does not matter very much which coping mechanism is used so long as the obviously
maladaptive and damaging ones are avoided. On the other hand, successful coping may simply depend on flexibility, adaptability and an adequate range of strategies and tactics. Perhaps as Pearlin and Schooler (1978, p.112) put it:

Having a particular weapon in one's arsenal is less important than having a variety of weapons... The single coping response, regardless of efficacy, may be less effective than bringing to bear a range of response to life strains.

Conversely, Steiner's (1970) work showed that people who demonstrate systematic preference for any one of several alternative techniques in response to interpersonal disagreement experience less psychological stress than those who choose, apparently at random, from alternative techniques. The results suggest that some individuals naturally prefer certain coping techniques for handling interpersonal stress and that being forearmed they are less affected by incipient or actual interpersonal stress than those who do not have such preferred coping modes. However, much of the observed consistency in human behaviour may simply be the result of people selecting and generating environmental conditions that are typical for them and to which they react in a characteristic way (Bandura, 1977; Bowers, 1973).

There can be confusion between coping styles and the outcome of coping, and some researchers label as 'copers' those who show little emotional distress or decreased physiological response (see Ursin, 1980). This can create conceptual
confusion and assumes a simplistic relationship between coping and outcome. Coping can have effects in three areas: psychological, social and physiological. Psychological outcomes include emotional reactions (for example, how anxious the person is), general well-being and performance on tasks; social outcomes include changes in interpersonal relationships and in the ability to fulfil social roles; physiological outcomes include short-term physiological reactions (autonomic nervous system, hormonal, immunological and neuroregulator changes) and long-term health changes (for example, development of coronary heart disease). Since a particular coping style can have different effects on psychological, social and physiological outcomes, it may be important to keep these concepts separate and study their interrelationships.

Several other researchers have examined the role of personality in coping with stress. Alker (1972, p.1) claimed that:

Personality variables can explain people's behaviour even though that behaviour varies from situation to situation.

However, Averill et al (1972, p.29) argued:

Again and again investigators have obtained what appears to be stable correlations between stress reactions and personality variables, only to have them disappear when tested in a slightly different setting.

To explain failures in coping by attributing traits to the
personality, for example, inadequacy, rigidity, authoritarianism or lack of achievement, does little to explain why such people fail to function efficiently. Another alternative is to study the ways in which people plan and prepare to deal with stressful encounters and how they carry out these preparations. Little is known about the ways in which successful people construct problem solutions and approach difficult transactions. This may be because people are more aware of the coping strategies they are struggling to use, or ones that are problematic, than they are of strategies which are successful (Horowitz and Wilner, 1980). People may also be unaware of particular mechanisms that they use (for example, seeking social support) if the mechanisms are a natural part of life routines (for example, daily telephone calls to friends). It may, therefore, be very difficult for successful copers to articulate their behaviours and even those, such as Arnold (1960), who have emphasised subjective appraisal, characterise this appraisal as a 'sense judgement' rather than as a more considered thought process. In a similar vein, Klinger (1978) noted that a person's report of a cognition cannot be verified, and it is even questionable whether the event can be recorded accurately. He explained (1978, p.227):

the validating process resides in ruling out artifacts, in replications and ultimately, in the usefulness of data or theory for making other forms of prediction and perhaps control.

It is important to study those who are not stressed as well
as those who are and those who were but are no longer. In noting variation in response to the same situations there is an opportunity to pinpoint those aspects of approaches and behavioural repertoires that lead to crises and those that make the situation only an occasion for further progress and mastery.

The process of acquiring most skills for dealing with stress is usually indirect and without organisation and the skills themselves may have no descriptive vocabularies to depict them. Thus, these skills may be very unevenly acquired and deficiencies may not be easily identified until extreme situations develop. Areas of incompetence can frequently be traced back to the inadequacy of preparatory institutions. Meyer and Chesser (1970) endorsed this when they stated that stress may result from the absence of appropriate responses because of a lack of suitable learning rather than from the stressor itself. Heidegger (1949) and Sarason (1966) have both emphasised that socialisation is likely to involve learning to employ superficial coping skills such as bravado, escape from fear and focusing on the fear rather than the problem that is evoking it; on what is to be avoided and how, rather than on the development of skills that will enable the individual actually to solve the problem. Janis (1958, p.375) described the "work of worrying" as a step toward dealing effectively with a threatening or challenging situation. Arnold (1960) has also referred to worrying as a preparation for action. However, people who describe themselves as
characteristically being worriers might not be taking a positive first step in coping with stress when they begin to worry. Rather, they may be creating colourful fantasies and exaggerations that instead of being of help in the coping process, serve to exacerbate or create stress where it may not already exist. The self-preoccupation of the anxious person, even in apparently neutral or pleasant situations, may be due to a history of experiences marked by a relative dearth of signals indicating when all is well.

1.10 STRESS AND COPING IN CHILDREN

The difficulties which many adults experience in coping with stress may be carried over from childhood. According to Wine (1971) children who are highly anxious divide their attention between task-relevant and task-irrelevant information and achieve lower task performance than less anxious children. When children are experiencing an overload of anxiety their capacity to process information from the inner and outer world is affected. Specifically, they are less able to process information at three levels; attention to environmental cues, encoding and transformation of these data and selection of overt responses (Phillips, 1978). In essence, under circumstances that induce stress reactions in children they can be expected to 'hear' less of what is being said to them, to process only a fraction of what is received and possibly to distort that and to respond in less effective ways to the person and/or the situational expectations or circumstances that comprise the stress.
Lipsitt (1958) found significant negative correlation between Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (CMAS) scores and scores on the self-concept scale for both girls and boys. There was a tendency for high-anxious children to be self-disparaging. Rosenberg (1953) found a strong negative relationship between self-esteem and anxiety pointing to the low esteem in which anxious pupils hold themselves. Suinn and Hill (1964) found a substantive negative correlation between self-acceptance and the measures of trait anxiety on the Manifest Anxiety Scale (MAS). Sarason (1966, p.74) stated that:

...a high anxiety score may be tapping not anxiety but coping tendencies.

Cowen et al (1965) discovered that anxious children are discriminated against by peers and reacted to in a negative manner. At the same time high-anxious children see themselves as unfit for positive roles and unlikely to be chosen by their peers and teachers for such roles. Cowen et al (1965, p.685) concluded that:

Regardless of whether the sociometric ratings are done by peers or the child himself, evaluations of nominations for negative roles and reduction of nominations for positive roles are found to be related to high anxiety.

The above authors also correlated teachers' ratings of children with CMAS scores. All correlations were significantly positive, indicating that teachers see the high-anxious child as being poorly adjusted and as possessing negative personality characteristics. McCandless
et al (1956) had children rate their classmates of the same sex in friendship order. The overall result supported the hypothesis of a negative correlation between anxiety and popularity. Although there were variations from class to class, the predominant pattern was for high ratings to go to the low-anxious children as measured by CMAS score. A similar study by Iscoe and Carden (1961) showed CMAS scores to be significantly related to sociometric status for girls but not for boys.

Singer and Schonbar (1961), Singer and Rowe (1962) and Reiter (1963) found that highly anxious children reported a higher incidence of daydreaming. High anxiety is generally associated with low achievement. Singer (1966) posited that the evidence indicated that the frequency of daydreaming did correlate positively at moderately high levels of anxiety when measured by questionnaire, suggesting that people who reported frequent day dreams also described themselves as more fearful, sensitive and anxious.

Challenge successfully met helps the learners to identify themselves as worthy, capable and likeable people. They meet new tasks with interest, courage and renewed hope and vigour. Pressure, however, carries with it feelings of haste, oppression and uncertainty. Instead of being able to concentrate on the task at hand, the child focuses fearfully on the expectations of the parent or the teacher and dissipates energy in unproductive worry, in self disparagement and eventually in the normal efforts of any
living organism to escape discomfort and frustration. Indeed, as the magnitude of the stressor increases, people are inclined to respond with increasingly primitive responses (Lazarus, 1966). This opinion was endorsed by Kelly (1963, p.128-129) when he argued:

When he is under pressure he is not likely to develop new channels; instead he will tend to reverse himself along the dimensional lines which have already been established. If the emergency is great and the pressure intensive, the movement is likely to be fruitless. In that case he will show marked contrast behaviour along the major axes of his personality.

Phillips (1978) carried out a study in which almost 75% of the children questioned said they wished the teacher would slow down in order to give them time to understand better what was being said. This is a significant source of achievement stress because so much verbal communication occurs in relation to academic work. In this same study many said they worked hardest under competitive conditions which supports much of the research evidence. More importantly, it is obvious that a great deal of stress is inherent in the competitiveness that underlies so much school work. Almost two-thirds of the pupils in the above study believed that bright children received privileges denied to other children. About 40% of all children in the study created stress for themselves by being academically successful. Teachers frequently are not aware of the 'boomerang effect' created by praising children who have done well. As Sarason (1975, p.26) observed:
We live in a test conscious, test giving culture in which the lives of people are in part determined by their test performance.

Spielberger (1972) conceptualised test anxiety as a situation-specific, anxiety trait. Although examination situations are stressful and evoke state anxiety (A-State) reactions in most pupils, the degree of the A-State response will depend on the pupil's motivation and perception of a particular test as personally threatening.

McClelland et al (1953) and Atkinson (1957) have suggested that the achievement motive is not uniform across individuals. Two kinds of person can be identified; one more likely to be motivated by fear of failure and one by the need for achievement and success. The achievement and success oriented individual is more likely to seek achievement related activity, whereas fear-of-failure individuals are more likely to protect themselves from it. The achievement oriented individuals are found to prefer and persist with tasks of intermediate difficulty where success is possible and failure is unlikely but where there is interest and challenge. They also tend not to persist when circumstances tell them that success is unlikely (Atkinson and Feather, 1966). In the same study the middle class child was identified as being approach oriented (preoccupied with achieving success especially socially) and the working class child was avoidance (of failure) oriented in their school behaviour. They conceptualised anxiety in terms of an approach-avoidance paradigm and related anxiety to the need to avoid failure. The importance of this is that the
school setting provides a natural laboratory in which many individuals are exposed to failure.

Seligman (1975) put forward the concept of 'learned helplessness'. He postulated a learned cognitive style which varies according to the extent that people anticipate positive outcomes, perceive the outcomes as within or outside their control and attribute failure to unalterable faults in themselves, rather than either to behaviour which they can modify or to external factors which may change. Brown and Harris (1978) used a similar cognitive model and suggested that their 'vulnerability' factors operate by creating feelings of low self-esteem and lack of mastery. This feeling of hopelessness, in turn, makes people less able to deal with stressful transactions which persons without such a negative cognitive style may confidently take in their stride.

Boys generally react worse than girls to stressful events but the reasons remain unclear. Various suggestions have been put forward. Parents may be less supportive of boys in their attempts to cope with stressful transactions, or are more likely to respond negatively to their distress reactions (Elder, 1979; Hetherington, 1980). Dweck et al., (1978) found that boys tend to respond with greater efforts when they receive feedback from adults that they are failing, whilst girls tend to give up and attribute their failure to their own lack of ability. Patterns of interaction are affected by temperamental differences
associated with sex (Eme, 1979) and there may be a biologically determined increased male vulnerability to physical hazards (Rutter, 1970). There is little evidence on which to base a choice between these (and other) alternatives and it is not at all certain whether the explanation for the sex differences will prove to be the same or different for different types of stressors.

It has been suggested that more intelligent children are better able to cope with stress than their less intelligent peers. Such an hypothesised situation could operate through the protective influence of high self-esteem and a sense of achievement, or it could reflect greater problem-solving skills (Shure and Spivack, 1979). Alternatively, it could simply be that, for other reasons, intellectually able children are constitutionally more resilient (Rutter, 1981).

Festinger (1954), in his Social Comparison theory, hypothesised that every person has a need to affiliate. This need is brought to the fore whenever the individual experiences cognitive unclarity concerning skills or attitudes. Affiliation enables the person to take part in social comparison through which clarity may be obtained. Schachter (1959) suggested that the above theory should include the emotional domain as well. He argued that the basic need for clarity applies to cognition skills and emotions. Affiliation is favoured in specific and general physical threats (Ben-Yehoiada and Teichman, 1978). Affiliation is rejected in specific ego threats that,
because of their specificity, may reveal individual problems to prospective associates (Dabbs and Helmreich, 1972; Teichman, 1973). Affiliation is also rejected by those who have a high predisposition for emotional arousal and are exposed to high ego threats (Teichman, 1973). Schachter (1959) showed that, under conditions of anticipatory fear, people tend to prefer affiliation with others to social isolation and that, under some conditions, such affiliation leads to reduction in fear (Kiesler, 1966; Wrightsman, 1960; Zimbardo and Formica, 1963).

According to Garmezy (1983), detailed specification of the environment has been absent from the stress and coping paradigm. Adaptive and maladaptive behaviours, he argued, are found in the relationship between the person and the social environment, rather than exclusively in the biology and psychology of the individual. These environmental variables can be considered at the broad, total environment or macro-setting (for example, school) or the narrower, micro-setting (for example, the classroom). The importance of individual and environmental factors that can influence vulnerability to stress is persuasive, despite the fact that the specific influences that account for the different styles of coping too often remain speculative. Appley and Trumbull (1967, p.11) suggested that:

Where it is known what a person holds important and not important, what kinds of goals have for him been likely to increase anxiety or lead to aversive or defensive behaviour - a reasonable prediction of stress-proneness might
Schafer (1978) suggested that people should learn to manage stress by enacting one or more of the following eight strategies:— maintaining a foundation of sound health and fitness; becoming more aware of themselves and others around them; taking responsibility for their feelings, thoughts and actions; finding ways to develop inner strength; finding ways to express feelings; maintaining patience toward imperfection and tolerance of adversity; keeping a strong, stable support of family and friends and creating and maintaining personal stability zones. Broadbent (1982) emphasised the importance of interest in leisure activity as a means of ameliorating the effects of stress. There is the possibility of indirect distraction in that leisure provides a topic to think about during the day and provides a source of social support. It can also be argued that a person has an alternative area where control can be established.

According to Caplan's (1964) theory, stressful events are viewed as crises to be resolved in either an adaptive or maladaptive manner with either outcome having implications both for the person's ability to resolve future crises and for later adaptive functioning. Those able to cope effectively with such events are more likely to come away with their coping abilities enhanced; the same events experienced by those who deal ineffectively may be more likely to lead to pathological outcomes (Felner, 1984). It is important to examine the possibility that under some circumstances (for example, in individuals with good coping
skills) even negative changes may relate to adaptive outcomes. Negative events might be seen as offering the potential for positive outcomes if dealt with adaptively.

Many people have found that their lives increase in richness after a crisis. Distress can increase independence, self-support and insight. It can result in clarified values, intensified commitments and deepened trust. Whether distress brings despair or is the genesis of new life depends largely on the wisdom, courage and creativity of a person's personal construct system.

1.11 THE PRESENT STUDY AS AN EXTENSION OF PAST RESEARCH

It is evident that there are many angles from which to approach research into stress. This thesis adopts the view that stress is an interaction between the person and the environment. The relationship is considered to be individual and one which is shaped by the personal construct systems that people use to make sense of their particular world. The position is taken that people create their own ways of seeing the world in which they live; the world does not create the views for them. People possess many interchangeable 'lenses' or constructs from which they can select in order to obtain a different view of their world. Constructs are used to predict and, as the world moves along, these predictions are either confirmed or disconfirmed. This provides the basis for the revision of constructs and, if necessary, of entire construct systems.
Kelly (1963, p.15) described this as constructive alternativism and explained it thus:

We assume that all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement.

...No one needs to paint himself into a corner; no one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances; no one needs to be the victim of his biography.

The knowledge that it is always possible to reconstrue events is empowering and this important point is examined in the course of the present study.

The vast majority of research into stress has been carried out with adults and studies which have been conducted with children have, for the most part, been modelled along adult lines and viewed from the adult perspective. Indeed, answers have frequently been sought from parents and teachers rather than from the children themselves. Many researchers have used personal inventories with children but their validity is determined, in part, by the respondents' ability to read and understand the items. As a result, the information may be biased or superficial. Some researchers seem to distrust the value of direct personal statements and have couched their tests in ways that obscure from the respondent what is being measured. Others have chosen scales of measurement which, unlike tests, do not indicate success or failure or strengths or weaknesses and some have even embedded lie scales in their questionnaires on the assumption that the respondent is out to deceive. From a Kellyan viewpoint such methods have little application.
because, in order to understand people's construct systems, it is essential to grasp their unique frame of reference, that is, the dimensions and terms of meaning through which they relate to their world. As these cannot be known in advance, the standardised applications mentioned above cannot fully reveal the rich diversity of individuals. A much more open approach must be adopted to reach the complex, subtle and indiosyncratic ways that people construe events. In this thesis Kelly's (1955) informal approach which is modelled along the lines of a conversation between equals is used and thus the human instrument, rather than any formalised tool, is the preferred method for eliciting the pupils' constructs concerning stress and coping.

Research findings have demonstrated that reliability of event-recall deteriorates over time and that retrospective reporting is, therefore, of limited value. In order to examine this difference in recall, the present study analyses pupils' responses to stress and coping not only within the space of one year, but also with reference to the immediate past, as well as examining stressful encounters as they take place. In this way the three sets of data are compared and any discrepancies examined.

While several writers have discussed the general role of the mediators of stress there have been relatively few studies that have dealt with those factors which might be most relevant for children. In the work reported in this study the respondents identify a wide variety of factors which
mediate the impact of stress. An examination is made of the role these play in the coping process. The term 'coping' is used to describe all behaviours employed by pupils to deal with stressful events. Distinction, however, is made between good and bad coping styles according to the criteria used by the pupils to evaluate their coping strategies.

Compared with so many studies this thesis is less concerned with the major upheavals that can produce stress in children's lives. Instead, there is an emphasis on identifying the more frequently occurring day-to-day stressors and the ways in which these are perceived and handled. The part played by the school in reducing or adding to the stress experienced by the pupils is also examined.

The present study is designed to fill some of the gaps which have appeared in the research to date. In particular it examines pupils' perceptions of and reactions to stress and coping in school during their second and third years of secondary education. The approach adopted in this thesis is based on the philosophy of personal construct psychology with its emphasis on movement, change and growth. In the Kellyan spirit, the work is conducted from the pupils' personal perspectives of stress and coping. This is in contrast with much other research in which the children have had to orientate to the researchers' perspectives. In order to understand the pupils from their own frame of reference, qualitative methods which yield descriptive data are
employed. Furthermore, the roles played by both the researcher and the respondents are explored in detail. Salmon (1977), describing psychological research in construct theory terms, showed the necessity for researchers to make explicit their own position on the topic to be researched:

From a Kellyan standpoint, the convention of a non-person, black box of an investigator, and a group of subjects described only by some crudely defined common denominator, is totally inappropriate. By contrast, the particular issue and investments, with all their idiosyncratic ramifications, which constitute the research topic for the researcher, need to be fully explored and articulated.

In addition, not only is a wide range of stressors identified but the ways in which these change from second to third year are examined in detail. A most important focus of the present study is on identifying coping responses. A detailed, qualitative analysis of the data reveals the variety of ways in which the coping strategies develop, or fail to develop, during the course of one year.
CHAPTER TWO

HOW PAST EXPERIENCE SHAPED THE PRESENT STUDY
2.1 **INTRODUCTION**

In order to set the thesis in context and to make clear my reasons for approaching the study in the way I have, it would be appropriate at this stage to describe my present position as a researcher with reference to my past experience. This is necessary because, as Gouldner (1968; 1970) and Mills (1959) made clear, research is never value free. Indeed, Becker (1966-67) argued that it is impossible for researchers not to take sides in their studies. Berger and Kellner (1981) used the term 'bracketing' to refer to researchers' awareness of their own personal values and preconceptions. Bracketing is necessary for the researcher to rise above biases and prejudices and so see the situation from a new perspective. Berger and Kellner (op. cit., p.52) argued that:

> If such bracketing is not done, the scientific enterprise collapses, and what the sociologist then believes to perceive is nothing but a mirror image of his own hopes and fears, wishes, resentments and own psychic needs; what he will not perceive is anything that can reasonably be called social reality.

Bannister (1981) showed that the theory the researcher holds about people and about people as inquirers, must carry over into the research methods chosen and the ways in which these are conducted. For the above reasons it is only right and proper that I make explicit some of the values I hold about education in general, but more particularly about pupils as learners and, arising out of that, as respondents in my research.
I shall begin with a personal, professional history which is bound up with the theoretical and practical development of one area of education.

2.2 PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND CHANGES IN THE TEACHING OF HEALTH EDUCATION

My background is in Secondary school teaching. For 10 years I worked for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) as a teacher of Physical Education and Human Biology. During that time I became increasingly involved with the pastoral side of the curriculum and with Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) in particular.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there was an upsurge in interest in the teaching of PSHE and it moved from the fringe of the curriculum to establish itself at the centre of the educational debate (see Hargreaves, 1984). Previous teaching materials used in Health Education had their emphases on Locke's model of the individual as passively assimilating experience. Teachers frequently considered that they did not possess the required specialist knowledge and so-called experts visited schools to do one-off sessions in the classroom. Pamphlets, posters and films were a major feature of such programmes and the emphasis was on health knowledge. Ryle (1949) termed the type of knowledge acquired by this approach 'propositional knowledge'. However, the disturbing discovery was that the possession of this knowledge, life-saving though it could be, was having
little or no effect on the pupils' behaviour.

Slowly curriculum planners came to realise that new teaching methods were required and so it was during the 1970s that the teaching of Health Education began to be revolutionised. Among the models examined by progressive educationalists was a study based on Phenix's (1964) belief in the importance of the use of key concepts as basic, central ideas, an understanding of which opens the door to an effective grasp of what Hirst (1965) termed a 'field of knowledge'. A new approach was developed which shared Downey and Kelly's (1978) opinion that people are characterised by their ability to develop their own autonomy and are capable of making their own rational decisions on controversial issues. There was a shift away from the topics approach, with its focus on cognitive aspects but which ignored the social contexts in which the topics arose, towards what Stenhouse (1975, p.84) referred to as a "process model", with its emphasis on why people behave as they do. This model is based on the notion of 'process' as involving knowledge, reflection or clarification and decision making, rather than upon knowledge alone.

The radical change in the approach to teaching Health Education produced a flood of materials and appeals for courses on the best use of these teaching aids. Health Education had now expanded to include the physical, mental, social, and for some people the spiritual aspects of health. In 1984, ILEA renamed Health Education, 'Personal, Social
and Health Education' (PSHE).

One of the main aims of PSHE is the development of group support, trust and co-operation. This is in contrast with the more traditional competitive, individualised learning which goes on in most schools. The group work is sequential and concerned with helping pupils in their growth and development, in their social skills and in the kinds of relationships they establish with others. Its purpose is to provide opportunities for pupils to relate to others in a non-criticising, supportive atmosphere. It is especially concerned with helping pupils develop social competence so that they may become more capable of dealing with their own problems. In this sense it is developmental and educative, as distinct from problem or crisis-based.

Undoubtedly PSHE taught in this manner is a special kind of innovation in that it embraces not only curriculum development but also a fundamental change in teaching styles and modes of teacher/pupil interaction. Indeed, the methodologies of PSHE are as important as the materials within the programme. The teacher's leadership emphasises the collaborative nature of the work. The role of the teacher is to foster the initiative of the pupils and bring them into the centre of decision making and responsibility. Their own evaluation is an important component of the experience and scaled assessment is designed to sharpen the pupils' ability to be articulate about their own development. The move, then, is away from the didactic
approach towards a more facilitating role for the teacher, who is no longer the one with all the answers. As well as providing information the teacher must try to develop sensitivity within discussion. Each person's point of view should be sought and given equal importance, providing that it could not in any way be hurtful to others. Phares (1976) found that in cases where pupils consider they are without control over their lives, they are unable to see the tie between their actions and the results of those actions. However, it is certain that young people are not going to face up to themselves and adopt new positions unless they judge the situation to be supportive. Those who teach PSHE in the above way can ensure this support, not only by the activities chosen, but also by the type of leadership adopted.

Taught in this way, PSHE requires a change in pedagogy from the teacher as a solution giver to the teacher as a problem poser or creator. The pedagogy, in a context of self-discovery by the pupils, now emphasises the means whereby knowledge is created and principles are established. Such a change in pedagogy alters the authority relationships between the teacher and the taught. As the teacher's relationship with the class changes this, in turn, changes the principles of control. The teacher is now part of the group and is no longer seen as the disciplinary figure but as the encourager of self-discipline and group responsibility. Pupils regulate their own control procedures through the formulation of a contract.
It would appear that certain qualities in the teacher are necessary for the successful development of PSHE. These include a high degree of sensitivity to the pupils’ feelings and an empathy with the young people concerned; attributes, perhaps, more likely to be found in teachers who have a genuine liking for their pupils and a respect for them as individuals. Teachers who are successful will listen to the pupils rather than talk at them and be happy to establish a different kind of relationship with them; one on a more equal footing, based on trust and mutual support.

It cannot be over-emphasised that teachers using this approach must be fully aware of the conscious and unconscious processes involved. It is easy and comforting to believe that pupils are being presented with opportunities for making decisions while pressure is being put upon them to conform to goals provided, perhaps unwittingly, by the teacher. As success can be so difficult to determine, teachers lacking the confidence or comprehension to trust fully the processes involved, can inveigle the pupils into illusory, rather than real, decision making. It may be more appealing and easier for staff to concentrate on persuading pupils to choose the ‘right’ answer than to risk the possibility of their opting for the ‘wrong’ choice. Teachers need to consider carefully and as a matter of principle whether their focus is to be concentrated on the quality of the process or upon the end results of the process. Whichever is chosen, those involved
must be fully aware of what they are doing as educational ethics are involved, as well as the expectations of a society requiring young people to conform to certain codes of conduct. It may be easier than the teacher would imagine to cross the line between teaching and indoctrination and Baelz (1979, p.180) gave a useful distinction when he explained:

The difference between education and manipulation is not that the manipulator is all the time influencing his pupil while the educator is not influencing him at all. The difference lies in their respective aims. The educator encourages his pupil to develop the capacity to think for himself while the indoctrinator wishes to make it impossible for his pupil ever to question the doctrine he has been taught.

School, of course, is not the only influence in the life of the pupil. It can clearly be recognised that all pupils receive PSHE of a kind, commensurate with the continued process of socialisation. Attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour are a by-product of living in a given family, in a given society. For their part, however, schools generally need to be more aware of the part played by the hidden curriculum in the education of their pupils. Some of the messages given by school are contradictory and not conducive to pupil growth and development. If the caring and learning parts of the school experience are split, the pupil will be unable to make sense of, and grow in, the educational setting. Everything in the school, from the organisation of the curriculum to the rules about entry to a classroom, contains positive or negative messages about pupils'
identities. A positive self-concept is the foundation for responsible behaviour and the procedures and routines of the school must continually be examined in this light.

In the way that PSHE is a form of initiation (in the Peters (1966) sense), it must be concerned to help pupils to see where they are in terms of values and beliefs. It is necessary to distinguish between factual and moral judgement. It is one thing to describe society and explain why things happen the way they do, but it is quite another to say what ought to happen. Teachers can be helped to overcome these problems by acquainting themselves with the theory and practice of values-clarification. Pupils too must have the opportunity to become aware of their own values, as well as developing skills in values-clarification procedures. That Fromm (1957, p.v) considered values-clarification activities as an important dimension of health is clear from his statement that:

... the value judgements we make determine our actions and upon their validity rests our mental health and happiness.

Jerrick (1978, p.559) endorsed that view when he posited:

The most significant advances in teaching mental health concepts in the past years are the result of humanistic or affective education movement, including values clarification techniques.

The growth of PSHE can be described in the sociological terms used by Craft (1969) and which are derived from
Durkheim's theories of social order. PSHE can be seen as a way of meeting the 'functional imperatives' of a changing society. In other words, it has grown to cope with the tensions and to alleviate the effects of rapid industrialisation or urbanisation and to enable society to make the best possible use of human talent. Hughes (1971, p.97) also referred to a changing society when he quoted Reuchlin:

One hears little of pupil guidance in periods of social or economic stability.

In a similar vein Hamblin (1974, p.12) argued:

As the rate of social change accelerates, so does the work of the teacher and his contribution to the pupil's search for identity and purpose in life becomes vital.

According to Pat White (1989) the growth in personal and social education can be accounted for by an increasing awareness of the great variation in local values in this multi-cultural, multi-faith society combined with a lack of agreement on a more general framework of values. The above author went on to welcome this growth as, she argued, personal and social education provides the framework for the whole of education. John White (1989), however, warned that:

Others are afraid that PSE is being used as an instrument of 'social control' of pupils for other interests than their own.

The evidence for the increase in family breakdown, the accelerating rate of change in society and the continuing
high level of unemployment could all indicate a priority need for successful personal, social and health education. However, there is a world of difference between reflective PSHE and the kinds of suspect, politically/economically based demands made on schools to 'fit pupils for society' and teachers need to be aware of this crucial difference.

During the early 1980s I attended many courses on PSHE and was involved in the writing of materials for classroom use. New text books and teaching handbooks were regularly being published and many resources were available only to those who had attended a course on their use.

To adopt a new stance in my approach to teaching took a certain amount of courage. To move, symbolically as well as actually, from behind my desk required confidence both in myself as a teacher and in my pupils as learners and that the results would be mutually beneficial. The results were interesting; to be allowed to speak without interruption, to be listened to without criticism, was a novelty for many pupils. They took courage from each other and some hitherto silent members of the group found voices to share thoughts and opinions about themselves; many seemed to blossom, to show enhanced self-esteem, to demonstrate a sense of responsibility hitherto unknown and to describe the personal relevance of the work for them. This, in turn, led to a better social and working relationship within the group.

Although it was with PSHE that I used this style of approach
I found that the benefits spilled over to other areas of my teaching. For instance, it soon became apparent that I was allowed to see facets of the pupils (and, hopefully, vice versa) which a more didactic style of approach did not permit. I was enabled to see the pupils as individuals rather than just faces in a class, names on a register.

My interest and involvement in PSHE developed and in 1984 I was seconded for one year to study for an MSc in Health Education at King's College, London. At the end of that time I returned to teaching but to a different school, as a reorganisation of several schools had taken place during that year. As a result of the work covered in the course and the time spent out of school I was able to take a fresh look at myself as a teacher and to question many of my taken-for-granted views on education. The school in which I was now teaching had lost its Counsellor in the reorganisation and, perhaps because my new post was mainly concerned with Careers Education and Guidance as well as Community Work (there was no PSHE on the curriculum at that time), my office became a 'drop-in place' for a variety of young people. Some simply wanted to chat, others needed to be listened to; some talked and went without my ever knowing why they had come in; still others were troubled and disaffected with school.

From talking with, but more especially from listening to, these young people I learned how isolated so many felt from the process of learning, how irrelevant so much that went on
in school was to their way of life. Problems were not confined to the less academic or disillusioned pupils. Success, or a desire for it, brought its own difficulties for those whose peers were less well motivated.

When I saw an advertisement for a researcher to examine pupils' perceptions of stress in school I regarded this as an opportunity to seek answers to some of the questions I was asking myself and to explore further some of the problems I was encountering in my own pupils. The research was full-time, funded for three years and it was expected that the post-holder would enrol for a PhD.
CHAPTER THREE

PLANS FOR THE STUDY
3.1 RATIONALE BEHIND THE APPROACH TO THE STUDY

3.1.1 Introduction

In the early stages of the research I was 'open minded but not empty headed' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and envisaged that the findings from the study would form the basis of a handbook for use in PSHE. That was the broad, overall plan regarding the end product of the research. The essential groundwork to achieve this goal was still only a skeleton. This skeleton, nevertheless, had some sort of shape as I had formulated specific research questions. These questions even at that time, it was appreciated, might change as the research unfolded because they might prove to be inadequate or inappropriate. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.229) recognised the likelihood of change when they explained:

Far from being destructive, they are constructive, for these changes signal movement to a more sophisticated and insightful level of inquiry.

This is in contrast with the conventional inquirer who, according to Lincoln and Guba (op. cit., p.235), usually approaches a study "knowing what is not known" while the naturalist adopts the position of "not knowing what is not known".

In pursuit of answers to the research questions I determined to work with, rather than on, the pupils and to conduct the study naturalistically. Schwarz and Ogilvy (1979) argued that objects and behaviours take not only their meaning but
their very existence from their contexts. On this topic Diesing (1972, p.204) stated that:

A holistic theory is... appropriate... because it continually reminds the observer that his particular, immediate observation must be understood and interpreted by reference to a larger background and it provides a general account of the background that can illuminate the particular observed fact.

It was necessary, therefore, to allow sufficient time to get to know the pupils and to build a constructive working relationship before posing the research questions. This is in direct contrast with Bronfenbrenner's (1977, p.513) picture of typical research involving children:

...much of contemporary developmental psychology is the science of the strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time.

3.1.2 The Research Questions

The main purpose of the research questions was to guide my exploration of the pupils' perceptions of stress and coping. I decided that the way in which the conversations developed would be shaped by the pupils' responses which, in turn, would determine which questions were asked. In cases where groups or individuals had specific issues (concerning stress and coping) which they wanted to discuss I realised that the research questions might be inappropriate. In other words, the research questions were less important than the pupils' own offerings on the subject of stress and coping and the questions were certainly not to be adhered to slavishly.
Although I considered that the stress experienced by the pupils would focus mainly on school work and poor relationships with teachers I was determined to be open to the "unheard and unimagined" (Belenky et al). With this in mind, I wanted to encourage as broad a response as possible and the following research questions were used to bracket the target:

(i) What are the sources of stress in school as perceived by 13-14 year old pupils?
(ii) In what ways are these sources seen as stressful?
(iii) How do the pupils attempt to cope?
(iv) What do they do when they feel they cannot cope?
(v) In what ways could they be enabled to cope more effectively?
(vi) Can the school ethos and hidden curriculum contribute to stress reduction and, if so, how?
(vii) Can pupils be encouraged to share their more successful styles of coping with others and, if so, how?

As I considered this thesis to be an exploratory piece of work, as opposed to a hypothesis testing study, it must be emphasised that the function of the research questions was to aid my exploration of the pupils' perceptions of stress and coping. They were simply starting points, or guidelines, in my conversations with the pupils. The questions were not seeking standardised, particular answers nor were they used as part of a test procedure. Related to that, it was not appropriate to design the approach in a quantitative way because that would have narrowed down the scope instead of allowing me to be open-ended. For this
reason, I considered the application of psychometric tests to be inappropriate and chose, instead, to use the human instrument (as detailed in section 4.3.3) as the probing tool. Although conducted in the spirit of Kelly (1955), the research was not cast within any theoretical framework because I wanted to stay open to whatever concepts would be helpful to the development of the study.

3.1.3 **Method of Data Analysis**

In my own experience as a teacher I was very much aware of pupils' frequent, angry accusations that teachers think they know best and are rarely prepared to listen (really to listen, as opposed to simply allowing people to speak) to what the pupils have to say. Knowing that I was as guilty of this as the next teacher, I was determined to make amends in the course of my research. From the outset, it was my intention to try to understand the pupil's own unique frame of reference. Douglas (1970, p.ix) explained what this involved:

> The 'forces' that move human beings as human beings rather than simply as human bodies ...are 'meaningful stuff'. They are internal ideas, feelings and motives.

It was with these ideas, feelings and motives that I needed to get in touch in order to discuss, in the data analysis, the meaning behind the pupils' responses. There was a striving on my part for verstehen (Weber, 1968), a detailed understanding of the motives and beliefs behind the pupils' words and deeds. In an attempt to achieve this, the data
were analysed qualitatively. As this type of analysis is inductive, I developed concepts, insights and understanding from common patterns, themes, tendencies and motifs and from noting exceptions and divergencies, as opposed to counting frequencies and assessing the data for preconceived models, hypotheses or theories (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). This is in contrast with more conventional, quantitative research with its control groups and psychometric methods; its group comparisons and statistical analysis of dimensions associated with frequencies of particular responses. Additionally, I was less interested in differences between pupils on such grounds as social class, academic ability and gender although any significant differences between groups of pupils were open to examination.

Bannister (1981) showed that the theory which researchers have about people and about people as inquirers, has an effect not only on their research methods but also on how they decide to carry these out. Similarly, Rist (1977) pointed out that qualitative methods (in common with quantitative methods) are not only sets of data-gathering techniques, they are also a way of approaching the empirical world. A way that Blumer (1969) argued allows the researcher to stay close to it and as this was my intention, I resonated with the warning given by Taylor and Bogdan (op. cit., p.7) when they posited:

When we reduce people's words and acts to statistical equations, we lose sight of the human side of social life. When we study people qualitatively we get to know them
personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society.

This thesis, therefore, is concerned with understanding (rather than predicting and controlling) and establishing meaning inferentially. The findings from such an approach are illuminative and allow the researcher to develop an idiographic body of knowledge in the form of "working hypotheses" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.38) which describe individual cases. According to Patton (1990, p40) a qualitative inquiry:

"Places findings in a social, historical, and temporal context; dubious of the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space.

The inductive data analysis allows the multiple realities found in the data to be identified. This approach also permits the interaction between the researcher and the respondents to be made explicit and accountable and enables the setting to be fully described. Furthermore, inductive data analysis facilitates the identification of the mutually shaping influences which are present in the setting. In order to flesh out the broad group trends which emerged from the data, case study reporting has been chosen. The case studies were selected to exemplify in greater detail than snippets of conversation could, the stressful events in the pupils' lives and the effects these had on their behaviour in school. Although there were many similarities between the case studies, each is an idiosyncratic manifestation of the phenomenon of stress and coping. This style of reporting is well adapted to a description of the multiple
realities encountered and allows demonstration of the researcher's interaction with the setting and any consequent biases which may result. Additionally, it provides the basis for both individual "naturalistic generalisations" (Stake, 1980) and transferability to other settings ("thick description" Geertz, 1973). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.42) advocated the use of the case study because:

...it is suited to demonstrating the variety of mutually shaping influences present; and because it can picture the value positions of investigator, substantive theory, methodological paradigm, and local contextual values.

I was also aware of Stake's (1981, p32) words when he argued that:

Case studies can provide valid portrayals, better bases for personal understanding of what is going on, and solid grounds for considering action.

3.2 SAMPLE POPULATION

As the studentship was based in Edinburgh and I chose to conduct the field work there, working with pupils of Secondary school age. I decided to work with two classes of 13-14 year old pupils (second year) in two mixed Comprehensive schools. This age group was chosen because the initial fears and subsequent honeymoon period of the transition from primary to secondary school have usually passed. Furthermore, the attitudes of disillusionment and apathy so frequently found in upper secondary pupils have, for most, not yet become entrenched. It was decided to work
in two schools, different in kind from each other, in order to obtain a broader perspective on sources of stress and coping skills and to see if there were patterns of stress common to pupils in both schools.

These plans, however, were still purely theoretical and might prove to have little application in practice. Thus, a Pilot Study was considered appropriate in order to determine the viability of the approach and to answer some of the questions that I had in mind.

Before the above plans could be implemented it was necessary to choose schools in which to conduct the fieldwork.

3.3 SELECTION OF SCHOOLS

Four co-educational Comprehensive schools were chosen on the grounds that their philosophies and/or their socio-economic compositions were somewhat different from each other. One school had a roll of approximately 1000 pupils, coming from a wide catchment area. Included in the number were several children with physical disabilities. The second was a small Community school of approximately 500 pupils. Its intake included a large number of pupils whose families came from the Indian sub-continent. The third school had a population of approximately 1300 pupils and a reputation for academic success as judged by the numbers going on to higher education. The fourth school was set in a socially deprived area but when I discovered that it was under threat of closure and suffering from a falling roll and low teacher
morale, I decided against working in it.

The next duty was to obtain permission from the Education Authority to make contact with the schools.

3.4 GAINING PERMISSION

The Assistant Principal of the college wrote on my behalf to Lothian Education Authority outlining my research and requesting permission for me to approach the four schools described above. An extract from the letter can be found in Appendix 1. The reply asked for more detailed information concerning the amount of time needed with pupils and teachers. When those on the Research Committed were satisfied that the study would not interfere, markedly, with either the pupils' or the teachers' school work, permission was granted. In addition, the Headteachers of the four schools were notified by the Education Authority that I had been authorised to contact them.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PILOT STUDY
4.1 BACKGROUND AND PLANNING

The Pilot Study was conducted between September and December with one second year class (2X2) of 30 pupils.

4.1.1 Aims for the Pilot Study

The main aim for the Pilot Study was to determine whether this group of 13-14 year old pupils could articulate their perceptions of stressful situations in school. In pursuing this aim it was also intended to evaluate Kellyan conversation (in groups and individually) as a means of eliciting the pupils' constructs concerning stress and coping. Additionally, it was my intention to become acquainted with staff and pupils in a Comprehensive school in Edinburgh and to familiarise myself with the current Scottish educational jargon and procedures and the colloquialisms used by the pupils.

4.1.2 Choice of School

The school in which the Pilot Study was carried out was selected on the grounds that, subjectively, its ethos, examination results and socio-economic intake ranked between the remaining two schools.

Before any fieldwork could be undertaken the next and obvious steps were making initial contact, gaining entry and negotiating consent (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Details of these stages and of the composition and organisation of the
school can be found in Appendix 2.

4.1.3 Class 2X2

This mixed ability group consisted of 19 girls and 11 boys. From talking with the Assistant Principal Teacher of Guidance (APT) I learned that the range of academic ability in 2X2 was probably greater than in any other second year class. Several boys, I was told, could be particularly disruptive and this was attributed, in the main, to their difficulty in coping with school work. It was added that the number of bright girls far exceeded that of boys and that those girls who were less able tended to withdraw rather than disrupt. I was additionally informed that 2X2 was probably the second year class least liked by the staff.

4.1.4 Structure of the Study

The Pilot Study consisted of three phases. The first phase entailed non-participant observation, the second was concerned with Group Conversations and the third with Individual Conversations. Each phase, is examined in detail below.

4.2 PHASE ONE: ORIENTATION PERIOD AND OBSERVATION SESSIONS

It was essential to spend some time in school prior to working with the pupils in order to become familiar with the context, to minimise distortions and to build trust.

Parlett and Hamilton (1976) argued that initial observation is necessary to become familiar with the day-to-day reality
of the situation. It is extremely difficult to concentrate on data collection whilst trying to find the correct path through a maze of corridors and, therefore, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, collecting data is secondary to getting to know the setting and the people during the initial observation period.

4.2.1 Entering the Field

I attended four 40 minute Social Education lessons with 2X2 during which time I was a non-participant observer. I had no pre-determined observation schedule as this was likely to preclude the unforeseen and limit the variety of social interactions to a standard form. The observation sessions, therefore, were informal rather than systematic and idiosyncratic rather than standardised. Spradley (1980, p.32-33) described the first observations as "descriptive observation" in which the main question is, "What is going on here?" (Spradley, op. cit., p.73). Generally, I sat at the side of the class where I was able to take notes without any particular notice being taken of me by the pupils. During this time I was able to watch the class interacting and to form first impressions which were open to later reconsideration.

4.2.2 Establishing Rapport

As a symbol of my non-authority role within the school I introduced myself to the class by my first name. I chose not to say that I had been a teacher as I suspected such
information would affect the pupils' attitudes to me. Instead, I described myself as someone who was carrying out a project about pupils' perceptions of stress in school. I explained that I had nothing to do with the school and that anything they said would be confidential. I emphasised that the work could be done only with their help, that they were the only ones who knew the answers and that I hoped we would be able to work together to produce a project that would not only be interesting but which also might help others. As Lincoln and Guba (op. cit., p.100) explained:

Investigator and respondent together create the data of the research.

Meaningful human research is impossible without the proper understanding and co-operation of the respondents, as Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.105) made clear:

Unless the respondents willingly co-operate with an investigator in uncovering 'truths' about themselves, the inquirer has no hope of coming to a full understanding of the situation.

4.2.3 Reflections on Phase One

The observation period was necessarily short because of the limited time available for the Pilot Study. I did not consider, however, that I was sufficiently conversant with the culture of the school and was aware of Torbert's (1981, p.143) words when he warned researchers against:

...attempting to act well in situations which they do not fully comprehend in pursuit of purposes which are
not initially fully explicit.

I determined, therefore, to allocate more time for Orientation and Observation in the Main Study. This was necessary to promote a deeper knowledge and understanding of the setting and allow the questioning to become more focused and directive (Denzin, 1978; Spradley, 1980).

4.3 PHASE TWO: GROUP CONVERSATIONS

Having established myself as a known, if not altogether familiar, figure to the pupils of 2X2, the Pilot Study moved on to its second phase, which consisted of Group Conversations.

4.3.1 Aims for Phase Two

The main aims for this phase of the study were, first, to explore the research questions in small groups in which the pupils felt comfortable and, second, to allow the pupils and myself to become mutually acquainted prior to the Individual Conversations.

4.3.2 Voluntary Participation

Although it had been explained that participation in the project was entirely voluntary, it was appreciated that school policy did not encourage pupils to opt out of activities organised in school hours. No pupil demurred at taking part in the research. This, however, is not the same as saying that active participation resulted simply because
no one voiced a desire to opt out. Glass (1975, p.11) recognised the inherent dangers of trying to conduct research with unwilling conscripts:

There are no techniques available to the contemporary evaluator that do not depend heavily for their validity on the co-operation of the persons being evaluated... I know of no significant study which could not have been subverted by the deceit, passive resistance or non-co-operation of an unwilling group of subjects.

4.3.3 Theory behind the Practice

In the way that Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory had proved liberating in the sphere of psychotherapy, it held out promise as an appropriate way of eliciting and trying to understand the pupils' constructs concerning stress and coping. Kelly (1955) believed that in order to understand people it is necessary to grasp their way of perceiving the world and that means understanding the individual's personal construct system. Construing, making sense of things, is always personal because interpretations are unique. To understand the construct systems of others, it is necessary to grasp their unique frame of reference; that is, the dimensions and terms of meaning through which they relate to their world. Bearing in mind this uniqueness of personal construct systems, it is decidedly unhelpful to use preconceived, formalised or generalised measures, in the form of, for example, a scaled test or questionnaire, to understand such construct systems. Neither the dimensions of meaning nor the relationships of these dimensions can be
known in advance. Essentially, a much more open-ended approach must be taken to get in touch with the complex, subtle and idiosyncratic ways in which people construe events. Opportunity must be given for the emergence of particular focuses, terms of reference and patterns of relationship that are uniquely involved in each case. It must also be possible to explore what may at first sight be relatively inaccessible and far from obvious. Therefore, to promote an understanding of the terms and differentiations used by the individual, Kelly's informal approach, modelled after a conversation between equals, seemed ideal.

The conversation, which is being referred to here, is somewhat different from that in everyday life. In this technique it is essential that researchers set aside, suspend their own beliefs, presuppositions and opinions and adopt a credulous stance. In contrast with normal conversations, it cannot be assumed that the researcher knows exactly what the other person means and it is important to obtain clarification and elaboration of what has been said, even at the risk of appearing naive. It is essential to attend closely to what is being said and this means being open to hearing and understanding things in a novel and different way. Cottle (1973, p.351) explained clearly what this meant:

Pay attention to what the person does and says and feels; pay attention to what is evoked by these conversations and perceptions... Paying attention implies an openness, not any special or meta-physical kind of openness, but merely a watch on oneself, a self-consciousness, a belief that everything one
takes in from the outside and experiences within one's interior is worthy of consideration and essential for understanding and honoring those whom one encounters.

Paying attention entails attending carefully to personal meanings in order to understand the implicit, unstated pole of the construct and its subordinate and superordinate implications. Subordinate implications put necessary flesh on the construct and represent evidence or instances. Superordinate linkages refer to the values attached to the construct and are concerned with why things matter. This information is needed to develop what Kelly (1955) termed sociality, a term he used to describe how human relationships depend on mutual understanding of each other's constructs.

Human relationships differ from other relationships because of their reciprocity. As human beings are always in relationships with each other, research involving people cannot ignore the particular relationship between the researcher and respondents. Esterson (1972) argued that the reciprocity between researcher and respondent is special and that it must be given important consideration as it forms an inherent part of the larger study. If this reciprocal relationship is ignored, justice cannot be done to the emerging data and the richness of meaning will be lost. The very existence of this reciprocal relationship, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out, is dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to participate in it and support it.
In the approach chosen to conduct the Group Conversations, therefore, I, rather than any formalised assessment schedule, was the 'research tool'. Among the advantages of using the human instrument is that it is highly adaptable and can be developed and continuously refined as the research develops. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.105) observed that:

It is the quality of interaction that provides the human instrument with the possibility of fully exploiting its own natural advantages.

This interaction is helped by the fact that the language of construct theory, as Bannister (1981) showed, applies directly and equally to the researcher and the respondent.

4.3.4 Establishing Rapport

A degree of rapport is essential before any meaningful communication can take place. According to Denzin (1978), rapport means understanding the respondents' symbolic world as well as their language and perspectives. Argyris (1952, p.24) argued that the researcher must move through the person's "defenses against the outsider" whilst Goffman (1959, p.32) spoke of getting beyond the "fronts" which people build to cope with everyday life.

To establish rapport and to enhance the development of a positive, reciprocal relationship it was necessary to construct a situation which resembled one in which people
normally talk to each other about important things. To this end, the pupils were invited to arrange themselves in groups of their own choosing, consisting of two, three or four people. I estimated that these numbers covered most friendship groups. Furthermore, as I was interested in hearing what each pupil had to say I considered that, in the time available, four was the maximum number to allow all in the group a fair share of the conversation. Each group meeting was scheduled to last for 40 minutes and a programme was arranged showing when and where the groups were to meet. At the beginning of each session the pupils were invited to sit where they chose. It was emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions I would ask, that my main interest was in their opinions, that the project could be carried out only with their help and, perhaps most important of all, that whatever was said was confidential. Permission was sought to tape-record the sessions, with the understanding that anyone might turn off the recorder at any time. The machine used was a Sony TC 365.

4.3.5 Format for the Group Conversations

The first step was to build up an agreed network of meaning regarding the word 'stress'. As far as personal construct theory is concerned, this means establishing commonality, a term used by Kelly (1955) to describe the way in which one person's construction of experience is similar to that used by another. To determine commonality, the pupils were asked to suggest other words to describe what stress might mean to them. This was followed by asking what sorts of situations,
in general, might result in stress. When it was considered that common ground had been established, and to minimise the threat of talking directly about themselves to a relative stranger, the pupils were asked to think back to when they first came to the school and to consider what might be stressful for the present first year pupils. In this way a variety of stressful situations was identified. Each was examined for its stressful qualities and the feelings it evoked in the person experiencing it. This was followed by considering, in detail, the variety of coping responses used to deal with it. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the coping behaviours were discussed. The main aims for this part of the conversation were to help the pupils relax and to determine whether we were talking a similar language concerning the term 'stress'.

From there the conversation moved on to study the perceived differences between first and second year, with the emphasis on what was more or less stressful. As before, these situations were discussed in detail and the feelings and thoughts that accompanied them, examined. Coping strategies were studied and these were examined from the point of view of being good or bad ways of handling the situation. The decision of whether a coping strategy was good or bad was determined by criteria chosen and discussed by the pupils. The problems that arose when pupils felt they could not cope effectively were studied and suggestions were considered as to how pupils might be enabled to cope more successfully. I also found out whether the group members usually went about
together in school. Finally the role the school might play in stress reduction was discussed.

Heron (1981, p. 23) described the need for checking with respondents to ensure that their "intentionality" co-incides with that of the researcher. Periodically throughout the conversation, therefore, I provided the pupils with a summary of what I had heard. This 'playing back' not only stimulated pupils to remember additional information not originally mentioned it also enabled them either to confirm my interpretation or to clarify any points I had misunderstood.

Throughout the conversations I did not express my own views on the topics under discussion (and no pupil ever asked my opinion) nor did I ask the pupils to justify theirs. However, as I was interested in understanding what was being said I frequently asked pupils to elaborate particular points and, where possible, to move from abstract to concrete examples of stress and coping. I enquired whether the examples given had happened to the pupils concerned and if they had not, I asked how they knew what they were telling me.

In order that I should know who was speaking when I replayed the tapes, I always ensured that I used the pupils' names when they spoke for the first few times.
4.4 FINDINGS FROM THE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

4.4.1 Methodology

If judged by the prolific and varied responses, then the use of conversation to elicit the pupils' constructs concerning stress and coping proved most effective. The same approach, therefore, was used in this particular phase of the Main Study.

4.4.2 Allocation of Time

During the planning phase it had been decided that the Group Conversations would take place during the Social Education lesson which lasted for 40 minutes. At that stage I had little idea of how many groups I would see in that time as I had no way of estimating their response to me or to the questions I would ask. To simplify planning, each group was scheduled for 40 minutes with the proviso that changes could be made, if necessary. As it turned out, all talks lasted for the full 40 minutes and, therefore, I chose to allow this amount of time for the Group Conversations in the Main Study.

4.4.3 Pupil Groupings

Of the 30 pupils in the class, 22 were seen in groups. Of those who were not seen, two were persistent truants and the others were absent from school on the scheduled day. All groups were single sex. I spoke with three groups of four girls and one group of two out of a possible 19 and with two
groups of four boys out of a total of 11. The groups they formed gave me an unobtrusive measure of their sociometric make-up.

4.4.4 Group Interaction

At the beginning of each conversation I enquired if the group members usually went around together in school. It was noticeable that the quality of the interaction within the group was dependent upon the amount of contact its members had with one another in other areas of school life. Although the pupils had chosen their own groups, some had come together simply for the purpose of the research, whilst another group of friends had taken in an outsider to make up numbers. Two groups, both consisting of girls, were close friends in school and with them the conversation was rather more relaxed, the group members prompting each other to remember specific, stressful situations as well as contradicting and endorsing remarks made by each other. One of these groups consisted of four girls whose fathers had left the family home. This information was given to account for the fact that they were friends and had supported each other during stressful times.

4.4.5 Establishing Commonality

The first task with each group had been to build up an agreed network of meaning concerning the word 'stress'. With all groups this had proved to be relatively simple and the following are some of the pupils' suggestions:
"pressure"; "tension"; "it's when you're tired - but can't sleep"; "bad temper"; "anxiety"; "worry"; "depression"; "unhappiness"; "being argumentative"; "being in a bad mood"; "being horrible to everyone"; "feeling unable to cope"; "confused"; "unable to make decisions"; "wanting to be on your own"; "feeling all alone"; "being easily upset"; "frightened to get out of bed". The following are some examples of general situations which might result in stress: "having an argument with your parents or friends"; "being picked on by other pupils or teachers"; "parents constantly arguing"; "lack of money"; "serious illness in the family".

4.4.6 **Summary of Pupils' Responses**

All groups were able to suggest sources of stress in school and a degree of commonality and sociality was quite easily established. A variety of situations was identified and a number of themes emerged. By far the most common stressor mentioned by both girls and boys was bullying, although the fear of it in most cases outweighed the reality of it. The main perpetrators were boys who picked on girls and boys; girls mainly bullied other girls. The methods of bullying differed between the sexes, with boys indulging in more physical assaults than girls. The assaults ranged from kicks, shoves and punches to physical fights. Girls, on the other hand, were more likely to take part in verbal bullying, spreading rumours about each other and falling out with best friends, although physical fighting did occasionally occur.
It appeared that the old adage, sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me, was very far from the truth and some pupils, girls in particular, lived in great fear of the frequent verbal threats of what was going to happen to them. These threats often came to nothing but for some pupils they were worse than a physical fight. On asking group members if they had ever been bullied the boys, in particular, frequently replied that they had not, yet their conversations were dominated by discussion of it. Even when I suggested that we look at some other source of stress several boys brought all topics of conversation back to bullying, often for no clear reason that I could determine.

In all quotations from the fieldwork the initial S. is used to indicate that the researcher is speaking. The quotations are verbatim (except where otherwise stated) but the speakers' pauses and corrections are not shown unless indicated.

Brian, a dominant member of his group spoke about bullying:

B. In first year I used to lie in bed in the morning dreading getting up. I'd worry that they were going to get me today - hit me, push me around.

S. Did you get bullied?

B. No, never - but so many people did that I was waiting for my turn. People got picked on for no reason so you never knew how to protect yourself. You never knew what would start it off, so you didn't know what you should do or shouldn't do. I was on the look-out all the time. The worrying was probably more stressful than being picked on.
Gary was disappointed at some teachers' responses to reported bullying:

G. If girls complain about being picked on, teachers treat them with much more respect than if a boy complains. Boys are supposed to be able to look after themselves. They're told to go and sit down and not be a baby. Teachers don't seem to realise that being picked on is just as bad for boys as it is for girls. Sometimes people end up in fights and then the teacher says, "Why didn't you come to me before it got this bad?" But people don't want to be called a baby - especially in front of the whole class.

The others in Gary's group also complained that girls received preferential treatment, adding that girls were more mature because teachers treated them with more respect and so they responded accordingly.

Julie gave a girl's point of view on bullying:

J. I was picked on for ages by these bigger girls. They said horrible things and that was bad enough but I was always more scared that they would hit me.

S. Did they hit you?

J. No, but they kept threatening to batter me and that was the worst part. I couldn't concentrate on my work for thinking about being battered. I was scared to go out at break and dinner in case they were waiting for me and when school was finished I used to look for them in case they were waiting to get me. I made sure I always had a pal with me.

It was unanimously agreed by the pupils that second year was better than first. The fact that they were now no longer the smallest and most vulnerable members of the school community was usually given as the main reason. In addition, they were now familiar with the organisation of the school and generally knew what the different staff
expected of them. Philip rather aptly described school life as being like a jigsaw puzzle:

P. Everyone has their place and some of us have found where we fit in the jigsaw. Things get easier then - but some people haven't found their slot yet - you can see them trying to fit themselves into different positions. Some people will never find where they fit and that is very stressful. It's like that in real life too.

In an attempt to find out the ways in which the situations were seen stressful, the pupils were asked to describe their thoughts and feelings about the stressors. However, this proved to be rather confusing for many who had difficulty in differentiating between thoughts and feelings. The wording of this question, therefore, had to be changed because in personal construct psychology, as Salmon (1986, p.11) demonstrated, thoughts and feelings are interwoven:

...in a PCP approach there is no essential difference between thinking and feeling. In the network of meaning, feelings are inextricable. Feeling is carried in very fundamental constructs - constructs that are hard, perhaps impossible, to articulate. Most fundamentally, they represent the direction that we take in things.

In the Main Study, therefore, the pupils were asked to describe the situation, to tell me about it.

When I asked the pupils to describe their ways of coping they produced a great diversity of response. The answers to this question, therefore, were probed much more deeply in the Main Study. Girls, generally, were more prepared than boys to share a stressful encounter with a best friend and so receive support. Girls, on the whole, were markedly more
supportive of each other and a girl in tears received considerably more solicitous treatment than a boy, who, frequently, was ridiculed even further by both girls and boys. Some boys confided in another boy occasionally, but they were more likely to try to cope on their own or to discuss the stressful situation with their mother.

As the term 'coping' was used in this thesis to cover all behaviours employed by pupils to deal with stressful situations, the wording of the question concerning what they did when they felt they could not cope proved inappropriate. It was decided, therefore, to discuss difficulties with coping in the question concerning coping in general and to omit this question from the Main Study.

When I asked the pupils to consider how they could be enabled to cope more effectively they found it rather difficult to answer and many could offer no suggestions. Very few confused being enabled to cope with the removal of a stressor. For example, a small minority considered that they would be enabled to cope better if they had a different teacher for a subject but the vast majority accepted that school life could not be re-organised to suit them and that many stressors just had to be tolerated even though they were unpleasant. Most of these pupils coped by looking forward to third year when subjects, teachers and classmates would be different. Elizabeth suggested that people might be helped if they could be encouraged to talk about the stressor instead of "bottling it up inside themselves". She
explained it thus:

E. If you keep the problem to yourself you keep thinking about it and it gets bigger but, if you tell a friend - she might not be able to help - it sometimes gets smaller as you talk about it and then you can forget about it or do something about it.

The pupils were asked to consider if the school could contribute to stress reduction and, if so, in what ways. Many suggested that school was over-concerned with academic work. Philip described what he meant by this:

P. Some teachers only think we come here to work. That's all they're interested in - that's all they talk about. We should have discussions about what's important to us - what's going on in the world - not talking about things like volcanoes all the time. If we spoke about what interested us we could understand each other better and get on better. This is a good school but we don't really know each other because we're too busy doing lessons.

I enquired if the pupils could be encouraged to share their more successful styles of coping with others and, if so, how. Most pupils suggested that discussion in small groups would be beneficial. However, when this response was probed more deeply, many became less sure of their willingness to talk openly, adding that it would depend who else was in the group.

As stated above, the data were analysed for themes and patterns of stress which were common to pupils and there was less emphasis placed on the differences between various groups. However, as there were marked variations between the responses of girls' groups and boys' groups these are
now considered in more detail.

4.4.7 Differences between the Responses of Girls and Boys

There were no great differences between the sources of stress as experienced by girls and boys. There were slight differences in the coping styles they employed, as detailed above. The main difference, however, lay in the way in which they spoke about stress. Girls, generally, were not only able to suggest sources of stress, they were also quite willing to admit that many of the situations had happened to them. Boys, on the other hand, although equally adept at offering examples of stressful situations were far less willing, or able, to say that they had been in the situations; they always seemed to have happened to someone else. One group of boys said that they would not tell their peers about what they might find stressful. For them, it was all right to talk about stress in an abstract, impersonal way, but it would appear to be too threatening to talk about it on a personal level with their classmates present. Only one boy admitted to being the victim of bullying. Another, even when challenged by the group members, vehemently denied that he was frequently bullied by his classmates and insisted, almost desperately, that they were simply playing with him. As a result of these findings it was essential to compare these responses with those of boys in this particular phase of the Main Study.

4.5 PHASE THREE: INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS
4.5.1 **Aims for Phase Three**

The aims for the Individual Conversations were to enlarge on what had been said during the Group Conversations and to afford the opportunity for pupils to say anything they felt they did not want to share in a larger group.

4.5.2 **Voluntary Participation**

At the beginning of this phase it was again stressed that participation was voluntary and that anyone was free to opt out at any time. However, no one voiced a desire to opt out.

In order to complete this phase of the study within the allotted time it was necessary to work with the pupils during lessons other than Social Education. The Assistant Principal Teacher of Guidance arranged with staff for the pupils to be withdrawn from class and a schedule was drawn up showing where and when to meet. To disrupt classes as little as possible, each conversation was programmed to last for 35 or 40 minutes, depending on the length of the lesson.

4.5.3 **Building Trust**

Trust between researcher and respondent is a very sensitive issue that must be attended to throughout the entire study. It is developed over time, must never be taken for granted and is extremely fragile. The first part of each encounter with a pupil was given over to re-establishing the trust.
earned in the group situation as this was crucial to the overall credibility of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.257) described trust as being "biographically specific", by which they mean that trust is a relationship between two people on a one-to-one basis. This being the case, the researcher must seek to establish trust with each and every respondent and not simply with the group, en masse. According to Johnson (1975, p.94):

> The relationship of trust is a developmental process to some extent biographically specific in nature... It no longer seems plausible to think in terms of developing trust as a specifiable set of procedural operations. Rather, two or more persons engaged in a common course of social action may develop a sense of trust between them. It is a reality necessarily fluid and changing, always subject to reinterpretation.

Establishing trust followed naturally from establishing rapport and was conveyed as much by my demeanour and body language as by anything specific I said. In some ways trust is an intangible quality. It involves being non-judgemental. Benney and Hughes (1970, p.140) argued that:

> ...the interview is an understanding between two parties that, in return for allowing the interviewer to direct their communication, the informant is assured that he will not meet with denial, contradiction, competition or other harassment.

4.5.4 Format for the Individual Conversations

In this phase of the study photographs were used as an aid to conversation. The intention was to shift the focus of attention from the individual pupil to the photograph. In
this way it was possible to discuss the research questions in detail, without the pupils' feeling that I was probing into their private worlds and, in some way, forcing them to give details about themselves which they might not want to share.

Each session began by my seeking permission to tape-record our conversation. We re-capped on the work done during the Group Conversation to ensure both sociality and commonality. From this position it was possible to build on what had gone before.

10 photographs were used. They were in colour, measured two and a half inches by three inches and were of second year girls and boys. A school photographer supplied them from her leftover, unsold stock and the people in the photographs were unknown both to myself and to the pupils. During the first day's talks I used the same photographs with each pupil. As 2X2 was a mixed class I selected five girls and five boys and arranged the photographs, girl, boy alternately in two rows of five. When the pupils were asked to select a photograph, as described below, it was soon apparent that they preferred to choose photographs of their own sex. Thereafter, I changed the ratio of girls to boys, and presented the pupils with seven photographs of their own sex and three of the opposite sex. A different selection of photographs was used with different pupils, but they were still arranged in two rows of five. Despite this somewhat elaborate procedure, it must be emphasised that the
photographs were simply aids to construct-elicitation.

The pupils were invited to look at the photographs and whilst they were doing this, I explained that they were of second year pupils, that I did not know the children and, presumably, neither did they. We, therefore, knew nothing about them. We could, however, talk about them and obviously there could be no right or wrong answers. I was simply interested in their opinions. They were asked, when ready, to choose a photograph which we would talk about. The intention was to cover the research questions, by considering how the pupil in the photograph would perceive and react to stressful situations in school. When respondents could come up with no further answers, or had spoken at length about a particular pupil, they were invited to choose a different photograph. The aim throughout was that the pupils would be willing to move on to talk about real-life experiences and, where appropriate, about themselves. At the end of each session I enquired whether there was anything else I should have asked and whether the pupils had said anything which they would not have been willing to share in the larger group.

4.6 FINDINGS FROM THE INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS

4.6.1 Methodology

The use of photographs as aids to eliciting constructs produced much promising material. In all but one case the
pupil and I were able to move the conversation away from the child in the photograph to talk about stressful situations in the pupil's own life. The one exception involved a boy whom I had not seen previously in a group. Several pupils showed little interest in the photographs, preferring to talk about themselves. These people had issues which were important for them concerning stress and coping in school and so the photographs were not needed. Martin did try to use the photographs but explained why he would rather talk about himself:

M. I find it difficult to think how someone else would cope with a stressful situation. I can only tell you what I have done or think I would do.

The pupils' positive response to this phase of the study prompted me to consider using photographs only if necessary and not as a matter of course in this particular phase of the Main Study. I decided that photographs would be most helpful in cases where a pupil was rather reticent, ill at ease, or shy.

4.6.2 Total Number of Individual Conversations

A total of 24 Individual Conversations took place. Of these, four pupils had not taken part in Group Conversations. On saying to one of these pupils that I hoped she did not mind coming on her own, she whispered, almost conspiratorially, that she would rather come on her own.

4.6.3 Allocation of Time
In common with the Group Conversations, I had little idea of how much time to allow for the Individual Conversations. Perhaps they had already told me all they could, or were prepared to, in the group talks. Perhaps they would not want to see me on their own. In order to disrupt lessons as little as possible, however, each Individual Conversation was arranged for either 35 or 40 minutes depending on the length of the lesson. In the event, no conversation finished before the scheduled time. It was intended, therefore, to allocate the same amount of time for the Individual Conversations in the Main Study.

4.6.4 Differences between Group and Individual Conversations

Although the Group Conversations did produce personal examples of stressful situations, there was a tendency to talk about stress in a rather general way, with boys in particular seldom identifying with their own suggestions. When I asked pupils during the course of the Group Conversations if they had experienced the stressful situations they mentioned, they very often replied that they had happened to someone else. Conversely, the Individual Conversations were almost exclusively concerned with the personal experience of stress in school. One of the most interesting differences involved the change in position adopted by most of the boys. No longer were they simply observers of, or non-participants in, the stressful encounter. In the one-to-one situation they were free to
talk in a way they, apparently, did not dare to with other boys present. Some expressed envy at the support available to girls. One spoke of frequently not knowing how to cope and not having anyone to talk to about it. John explained why he no longer sought his parents' advice about bullying:

J. In first year I used to tell my mum about being picked on and she told my dad. He said to hit them, but I didn't want to fight. I don't think any one does - they just say they do. It's not so bad now, but I don't tell them (his parents) any more.

4.6.5 Summary of Pupils' Responses

No new themes emerged as a result of asking the pupils to consider what, in school, might be stressful for second year pupils. The problems continued to revolve around defective relationships with other pupils and staff. Stress arising from school work usually resulted from a difficult relationship with a particular teacher. Jane outlined what this meant for her:

J. I've always found Maths difficult and last year we had a teacher who shouted so much if you got it wrong and never praised you if you got it right. I hated maths and didn't learn much. This year we've got a really nice teacher. He never shouts and tries to help and says, "Good" if you get it right. I don't suppose I'll ever be very good, but I have learned some things and I like Maths now.

Amanda, a quiet member of her group, who was described by her classmates as being clever, described the child in each photograph as having a difficult journey to school. The conversation included other topics, but she kept returning to this bus journey. She then described her own journey to school:
A. Every morning I'm scared that they (other pupils) will throw my bag off at the wrong stop, or else they won't let me off at my stop.

S. Has this happened to you?

A. No - it happens to other people - but every day I'm scared they'll do it to me.

S. How do you cope with it?

A. I sit very quietly; I don't talk to anyone; I make myself small in the seat and hope they don't see me. I'm all right when I get off the bus - until the next morning.

This example of a 'daily hassle' (Lazarus, 1978) was typical of a great many responses. Most of the pupils had not mentioned them to anyone before and all said that they would not have admitted them in the larger group. Peter gave another example of a 'daily hassle' which was of great concern to him:

P. In first year I had to take the yellow slip (a daily attendance sheet) to the office during registration. On the way I was jumped by older boys who took the slip from me. That's what happens. Every morning the teacher tells someone to take the slip and I hate it when she tells me - some people say they won't take it. When I told the teacher the reason, everyone just laughed at me but that's why they won't do it - they just won't admit it.

The vast majority of pupils who described similar situations said they had told no one before because they felt ashamed and feared the ridicule of family and friends. Some of the incidents mentioned went back to their time in Primary school but the fear, the hurt, the shame and the scars were evident in the telling. Many considered that they should have outgrown what they felt were childish responses to the stressful situation. Perhaps because they had never
articulated their fear before it had assumed a greater importance than it merited. Indeed, much energy was expended in making sure that others were unaware of the stress they were experiencing. There was a tendency to concentrate on the problem, in an effort to avoid the situation, rather than on developing constructive coping strategies. Although pupils could think of ways to deal with their particular situation, very few could offer suggestions that they would actually risk putting into practice. That they were very real concerns for the pupils involved was evidenced by the details they gave, the amount of time they spent talking about them and the number of occasions that the conversation returned to the concern in question. In Kelly's (1955) terms their constructs, concerning the particular stressor, were pre-emptive and constellatory. That is to say, everything was related to the same anxiety-producing theme.

I asked the pupils to describe the strategies they used to cope and, as in the Group Conversations, this question resulted in a very wide range of answers. The coping behaviour chosen depended on a variety of factors as Andrew demonstrated:

A. It depends, really. It depends on how you feel - if you're tired you can't take much and you might just snap and get in a fight. Some days everything bothers you and other days nothing bothers you. It all depends what side of the bed you get out of.

Indeed, the coping behaviour chosen did sometimes seem to depend on things such as the way someone looked, or did not
look, at another; or the tone of voice used by the person regarded as the source of stress. Very often the pupil could account for the choice of coping strategy, for example, "if you're tired ... you might just snap and get in a fight". On the other hand, a minority of pupils could not articulate their choice of coping strategy; it was just something that happened; a reaction to the stressor. Coping behaviours were explored in greater depth in the Main Study.

The most difficult question to answer was that concerning the ways in which pupils could be enabled to cope more effectively. Although pupils reiterated that it might be helpful to talk about stressful situations it was not clear how this could be done. Some said they found it difficult to speak in class at any time and the idea of revealing personal information, as they had done in the Individual Conversation, was out of the question. Many considered that talking to one person was helpful and several mentioned who that person was for them. Some were of the opinion that little could be done to help them but considered that their coping skills would improve as they became older. When I probed this latter response I did not get very far. Several suggested that it was just something that happened with age and of that they were quite certain. When I asked them to explain this phenomenon further, a few looked at me curiously but added little more and one girl asked me, with surprise, "Didn't you know that?"

I was interested to learn if the school ethos and hidden
curriculum could contribute to stress reduction and, if so, in what ways. There was a general consensus among the pupils that the school was good, that relationships with teachers were, in the main, sound and that most teachers had the pupils' best interests at heart. There was an overall opinion, however, that the school system was over-concerned with academic work at the expense of personal relationships. Some pupils considered that several teachers were also aware of the imbalance but that there was little that could be done because the various schemes of work had to be covered before the end of term examinations. Grace described how the pressure of time had affected her:

G. I fell behind with my work when my mum and dad were always arguing. I was a bit of a nuisance and got into trouble with some teachers. When I asked the teachers to explain the work I'd missed they said they didn't have time and that they had a lot to do before the exams. I'll probably fail and it's not really my fault.

When I asked if the pupils could be encouraged to share their more successful styles of coping with others, the answers suggested that talking about the personal experience of stress and coping in a group was somewhat threatening and could be stressful in itself. In order to deal with this threat there was a tendency for the discussion to be kept at an abstract and objective level. As it appeared unlikely that group discussion would reach the personal levels achieved in the Individual Conversations I omitted this question from the Main Study. Brian's answer was typical of many:
B. People aren't going to be honest in a group. I said before that I wouldn't tell them what bothered me. I like talking and will talk about stress but I'd be careful what I said in front of others, especially about myself. Some people would use it against you.

In addition to the above questions, I enquired whether there was anything else I should have asked and also if the pupils had said anything in the Individual Conversation that they would not have said in the group. In answer to the second question all, except three girls, replied that they had preferred being on their own and that they had cited examples of stress and coping which they would not have been prepared to discuss with others present. Barbara explained her reason for this:

B. On my own I could just say what I wanted. I like the other girls in my group - they're my friends - but you still have to be careful what you say because you've got to see them every day. You might have an argument and then they might tell everybody what you'd said.

The three exceptions claimed to have said nothing on their own that they would not have been prepared to say to the other group members. They found the Individual Conversations harder than the group work because they had to do all the thinking on their own and did not have anyone to help them fill the gaps in their memory or in the conversation.

4.6.6 Ethics in the Field

Two Individual Conversations gave me some cause for concern given the confidentiality of my work with the pupils. I spoke briefly to the APT about the boys in question but it
was difficult to know what to say without disclosing what they had told me. Furthermore, in the limited time available to me in school there was little I could do to help. I did consider, however, that these boys had entrusted me with precious, personal information which I accepted and could give nothing in return. Case Studies of the boys can be found in Appendix 3.

4.7 OVERALL FINDINGS FROM THE PILOT STUDY

The Pilot Study had answered many of the questions I had in mind. As a result of "peer debriefing" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.308) I was able to focus with more confidence and clarity on the Main Study.

4.7.1 Evaluation of the Aims for the Pilot Study

The aims are detailed in section 4.1.1. The pupils had proved to be perfectly able and willing to articulate their perceptions of stress and coping in school. A degree of commonality and sociality had been established which varied between groups and individuals.

The approach used in order to understand the pupils' perceptions of and reactions to stress was loosely based on the philosophy of personal construct psychology in which Kelly (1955) advocated conversation as a means of construct elicitation. Two different types of conversation, namely Group and Individual, were carried out and the analysis of
the data from these suggested that Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory was a suitable approach for eliciting pupils' constructs concerning stress and coping. It should be emphasised, however, that in the time available and because of the number of pupils involved, the Group and Individual Conversations were conducted more in the spirit of Kelly rather than being rigorously focused on eliciting each implicit pole and exploring all subordinate and superordinate implications. However, a determined effort was made to maintain a credulous approach in an attempt to pick up the pupils' unique dimensions of meaning whilst trying to understand what they were saying and why it was important to them.

That the pupils were willing to share personal experiences of stress and coping, without the use of photographs in the Individual Conversations, might simply have been indicative of the positive and constructive relationships that existed between staff and pupils in this particular school and might not be typical of pupils elsewhere. Whether photographs were used during the Individual Conversations in the Main Study was determined by an evaluation of Phases One and Two as well as judgement on an individual basis.

In the course of the Pilot Study I had become acquainted with staff and pupils in the school and familiarised myself with the current Scottish educational jargon and procedures as well as the colloquialisms used by the pupils.
4.7.2 **Time allowed for the Pilot Study**

The Pilot Study was carried out over a period of 14 weeks. That time schedule proved to be much too short, as a result of which Phases One and Three were rushed. In the Main Study Phase One, the Orientation Period and Observation Sessions, needed to be extended in order to take the advice offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They argued that the researcher must try to become fully acquainted with the workplace before beginning the study. In this way the researcher not only begins to appear less conspicuous but also becomes familiar with the culture and the day-to-day organisation of the setting. These preparations help to increase both the effectiveness and efficiency of the formal work. They also prepare the researcher's mind for what is to come and so serve to sensitize and sharpen the human instrument.

Phase Two, the Group Conversations, was carried out as planned. Phase Three, the Individual Conversations, was too concentrated and needed to be spread over a longer period of time in the Main Study. In the time allowed it was over-ambitious to try to talk with every individual in the class. At the beginning of the study I had told the class that I was interested in everyone's opinions but was unprepared for the enthusiastic responses of the pupils. I had intended to see only a few individually, expecting that many would have lost interest by that stage. As this was not the case, it did not seem appropriate to see some and not others and, in any event, I could not decide on satisfactory criteria for
selecting individuals. The result was that there was no time for reflection between the Group and Individual Conversations.

In order to see all pupils it was necessary to conduct the Individual Conversations over a period of four consecutive full days. This proved to be more tiring than had been appreciated beforehand and the quality of listening and, therefore, questioning deteriorated as each day progressed.

4.7.3 Implications for the Main Study

It was necessary to extend Phase One for the reasons given above. More time had to be allowed between Phases Two and Three in order to hear the tape recordings of the Group Conversations, to prepare follow up questions for particular pupils and to adapt the questions for the Individual Conversations in any way necessary. In addition, I was able to check with pupils during the Individual Conversations that I had understood, in the way they intended, what they had said in the Group Conversations. It was also essential to spend no more than half a day at a time on Individual Conversations in the Main Study for the reasons given above. In the interests of credibility it was necessary to undertake "triangulation" involving sources and "member checks" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, pp 308 and 314).

At the end of the Pilot Study I examined the data for "recurring regularities" (Guba, 1978, p53). These
represented the patterns and themes which I organised into
categories. Many of the categories (for example, 'slagging'
'getting on/not getting on with teachers') were terms used
by the pupils to explain their worlds. In others I used my
own terminology (for example, 'presenting an image'). I
introduced these terms to the pupils in the Main Study in
order to ensure that their understanding of the categories
agreed with mine.

In addition to the above three phases, a fourth phase was
added in the Main Study. This involved identifying pupils
who could be placed in one of these three categories:

(i) Experiencing stress and not coping well.
(ii) Experiencing stress but coping well.
(iii) Not experiencing stress.

Attempts were made to understand and account for the
differences between the categories. At this stage I
attended classes with individuals who fell into the above
categories and the intention was to talk with the particular
pupil as soon as possible after a stressful situation was
encountered. Perceptions are almost inevitably slightly
changed in recalling events and this approach formed a basis
for comparison with the data previously obtained.

Having analysed the data it was evident that I needed to
seek answers to the following additional questions:

(i) Can the same coping strategies be used in different
situations?
What determines the choice of a coping strategy?

How do pupils evaluate their coping strategies?

With a view to producing material for use in Social Education lessons I had intended to explore ways of encouraging pupils to share their more successful styles of coping. In this way it was hoped that the benefits might be transmitted to the wider group. With this in mind, it was intended that Phase Five of the Main Study would consist of Peer Group Discussions when the pupils would be encouraged to share their experiences and, thus, to learn from each other. However, when considering the differences between the Group and Individual Conversations it was soon apparent that, with few exceptions, the pupils were much more willing to talk openly during the one-to-one sessions than they were in a group, even a small group of their own choosing. It was considered, therefore, quite inappropriate to ask the pupils to share, on a wider front, the many personal and private experiences they were willing to disclose in small friendship groups or, more especially, in a one-to-one situation. Consequently, Phase Five was not considered to be viable and was omitted from the Main Study.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE MAIN STUDY: SCHOOL A
5.1 BACKGROUND AND PLANNING

5.1.1 Initial Contact and Gaining Entry

Before the Main Study could proceed the first task was to obtain permission from the 'gatekeepers'. This term was coined by Becker (1970) to indicate those in charge of an institution. Kotarba (1980) advised researchers that they would increase their chances of gaining entry by projecting an image of themselves as non-threatening people who would not harm the organisation in any way.

As soon as arrangements for the Pilot Study were confirmed I wrote to the Headteacher of School A. I outlined my research, enquired about the possibility of conducting the Main Study in the school and suggested a meeting for further discussion of my research. In response, I received a telephone call from the Assistant Headteacher (AHT) responsible for Guidance and an appointment was made for me to visit the school.

Details of the school, my meeting with the AHT and my plans for Phase One can be found in Appendix 4.

5.2 PHASE ONE: ORIENTATION PERIOD AND OBSERVATION SESSIONS

As the study was to be undertaken naturalistically it was necessary for me to become part of the setting so that the degree of disturbance I caused was minimised. Emerson (1981, p.365) urged the observer:
...to become sensitive to and perceptive of how one is perceived and treated by others.

Furthermore, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested that observers should try to be aware of the ways in which members of the organisation change their perceptions and treatment of the researcher during different phases of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) warned that the mere presence of a researcher creates ripples and that sufficient time must be allowed for these to smooth out. In addition to the above advice, I was aware of the need to allow enough time for me to identify and observe the most salient factors in the setting. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.192) referred to this as "prolonged engagement" and "persistent observation". The purpose of prolonged engagement, according to these authors, is to open the researcher to the many influences that affect the research topic, while the aim of persistent observation is to pick out the most pertinent factors and focus on them in detail. Prolonged engagement gives scope and persistent observation gives depth. The researcher, however, must beware of the danger of premature closure, that is, focusing too soon, when engaged in persistent observation. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are two techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (op. cit.) to promote the credibility of the study.

5.2.1 Entering the Field

A total of 12 weeks was spent in observation and orientation. During this time I met a variety of staff and
pupils. Initially, I attended second year Social Education lessons on a Tuesday morning and later I also attended a lesson on Monday afternoons. Details of the lessons and of my interaction with staff and pupils can be found in Appendix 5. Geer (1964) advised observers to remain relatively passive throughout this phase of the fieldwork and to use the time to 'learn the ropes'. Johnson (1975) added that observers need to 'feel out the situation', 'come on slow' and 'play it by ear'. Corsaro (1985) described the observation period as 'prior ethnography' adding that it was essential for the researcher to become immersed in the setting before the study is actually undertaken. Such a step not only enables researchers to become less noticeable, it also allows them to become familiar with the culture of the organisation.

Another important aspect of the observation phase is learning how people use language (Becker and Geer, 1957; Spradley, 1980) and I was aware of the need to learn the various colloquialisms used by pupils and staff. I had already learned that the language used in both the handbooks for parents and staff was sexist. The pronoun 'he' was used throughout to refer to girls and boys in the parents' handbook, as it was in the staff handbook to refer to female and male teachers. The reason for this might have been that, until this particular academic year, all seven senior staff were male. When I pointed out the use of sexist language to the AHT she made a note of it for the future but the following year both handbooks continued to use the
masculine pronoun with the following excuse in the parents' handbook: "Throughout this booklet, we have used 'he' to avoid the clumsy 'he/she'".

5.2.2 Social Encounter with Two Student Teachers

Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) showed that classist and racial prejudice are reflected in the language of many educational settings and I was made aware of the first of these points when I met two student teachers. One of these, whom I met in the staffroom, said in an angry tone of voice that she did not like teaching in this school because the children were snobs and thought they were better than she. When I asked her reason for saying this she replied, "They've all been abroad on holiday and I haven't". All subsequent conversations I had with her included the fact that she had never been outside Scotland and, "Who do these kids think they are just because their parents have money". She said that she had been on teaching practice in a school in a socially deprived area of Edinburgh and had much preferred it there, because the children were more friendly and more appreciative of what the school did for them because they had so little and had never been anywhere. She claimed that the children in the present school were less friendly, wanted for nothing and were well travelled. Another student teacher, quite unconnected with the first, said that students did not like coming to the present school because the pupils were, "Sneaky, snide and superior". She described the pupils' behaviour as underhand and manipulative and added that, in other Edinburgh schools, the
pupils were more obviously naughty. She admitted that she was quite uncomfortable around, "These middle class kids who are always quoting Mummy and Daddy at me". She added, "They don't come up and tell you things - you don't know what they're thinking" and implied that they were being less than charitable in their thoughts about her. She said that she preferred, "The up-front working class kids every time". No member of staff I met displayed a similar attitude towards the pupils. Generally speaking, the pupils I encountered were less outspoken in class than those I met during the Pilot Study.

5.2.3 First Meeting with David

During the course of the term I encountered a variety of pupils. I frequently saw one of them wandering around the administration block talking with any senior member of staff who happened to be there. I never saw him with a friend or even another pupil and when I again encountered him during a Social Education lesson he was sitting on his own and apart from the others. I learned that his name was David. He was smaller than average and generally wore a rather serious expression. The first time I met his group they were scheduled to see a film in the tiered lecture theatre in another building. When I arrived there David, who was sitting on his own at the front (the rest of the class occupied the back rows) patted the spare seat beside him and, calling me by name, indicated that I should sit there. He said that, when his turn came, he would have a great deal
to tell me as he experienced considerable stress in school. He explained that he suffered from cystic fibrosis and often found it difficult to cope but that he had worked hard to overcome his difficulties. He added that he would give me some leaflets on cystic fibrosis the next time I was in school so that I could learn more about his illness. I was soon to learn that David was very garrulous and would engage any adult in conversation. It was clear from the turns of phrase and the expressions he used that he was accustomed to mixing with adults. Indeed, some staff viewed this with concern and did not like the way in which he ignored and was ignored by his peers. From talking with David, however, it was apparent that he was quite content with his relationships with pupils and staff, as demonstrated later in this thesis.

5.2.4 Difficult Field Relations

Towards the end of term I suggested to the House Counsellor, whose lessons I attended on a Tuesday morning, that I should ask the pupils to organise themselves into small groups in preparation for the Group Conversations at the beginning of the following term. At that point the House Counsellor began telling me his plans for the second year Social Education lessons for the coming term. It became clear to me that my proposal for withdrawing groups was going to interfere with his work schedule. Although I had explained my plans to him at our very first meeting (and at intervals throughout the term) and he had agreed to them, I had not realised that they did not really suit him; or perhaps his
own plans had changed as the term had progressed. In any case, it was quite evident that I would have to make alternative arrangements. As I had no wish to obstruct his plans I decided to talk with the AHT to see if a solution to the problem might be found.

As a result of that talk it was decided that I should meet the Head of the Religious Education (RE) department with a view to enlisting her co-operation. Details of that meeting can be found in Appendix 6.

5.2.5 Reflection on Phase One

Throughout this phase I looked at the school setting and the people holistically. Holism is based on the prime importance of the subjects and begins as Diesing (1972, p.141) demonstrated:

...from a general attitude of respect for human beings. ...Even a scientific reduction of a person to a set of variables is in a way disrespectful because it mutilates integrity.

I spent one morning and one afternoon each week for three months observing (in a non-participatory way) six groups during their Social Education lessons. During this time I became acquainted (formally and informally) with pupils, staff and school procedure. I was made very welcome by all concerned and, by the end of term, was a relatively familiar figure in the school, being recognised and generally accepted by teaching staff, ancillary staff and second year pupils. For example, on my way home from school one day I
was greeted cheerily by a girl who was in one of the groups I had attended. I overheard her explain to her friend, "We have her for Social Education". Although I had not said that I was a teacher and the pupils knew me by my first name only, the above remark did rather suggest that I was seen as a teacher.

As I gained information and understanding of the school setting my questioning became more focused and directive (Denzin, 1978; Spradley, 1980). Douglas (1976) warned that people hide important facts about themselves in everyday life and advised the researcher to 'check out' people's accounts of situations. Douglas (op. cit., p.147) explained what this involved:

Checking out consists essentially of comparing what one is told by others against what can be experienced or observed more directly and, therefore, more reliably, or against more trustworthy accounts.

I considered that I was now familiar with the language used by pupils and staff as well as having a reasonable understanding of the culture of the school. By this Furlong (1976) meant knowing how to behave in a suitable way from moment to moment in changing circumstances.

With hindsight, it was perhaps inadvisable to have considered withdrawing pupils from Social Education as they were timetabled for only one 40 minute lesson each fortnight. However, as the Head of RE agreed to release
second year pupils from her lessons, the problem was resolved satisfactorily and the way was prepared for the next phase of the study, the Group Conversations.

5.3 PHASE TWO: GROUP CONVERSATIONS

5.3.1 Sample Population

I worked with two classes, each of 30 pupils. These groups were selected because both classes had RE for one hour on a Tuesday morning. This allowed me to conduct four 30 minute Group Conversations during that time. All pupils in both classes were given letters, outlining the research, for their parents who were invited to contact the AHT if they had any questions or reservations.

5.3.2 First Meeting with Classes 2X and 2Y

As a result of attending Social Education lessons for 12 weeks I had met a mixture of six of the nine second year classes. Of the above two classes, I knew approximately half of 2X and all of 2Y. Class 2X consisted of 13 girls and 17 boys, whilst in 2Y there were 16 girls and 14 boys. The pupils were in their fifth term together and a shared culture had evolved during that time. In Kellyan terms, they had developed their own commonality and sociality.

5.3.3 Establishing Rapport

From the outset it was my aim to develop sociality or, as Taylor and Bogdan (1984) termed it, 'establish rapport' with
those involved in my research. This was essential for the credibility of the study. As Bannister and Fransella (1986, p.18) made clear:

If we cannot understand other people, that is, we cannot construe their constructions, then we may do things to them but we cannot relate to them.

Therefore, throughout the fieldwork I tried to empathise with the pupils and, in this way, to understand them in the context of their past and the situations in which they found themselves during their second year at school. Garfinkel (1967, p.11) argued that it is impossible to make sense out of other people's words and deeds without "knowing or assuming something about the biography" of the speaker as well as the accompanying circumstances. Schutz (1962, p.xxxix) endorsed this position when he noted that in face-to-face relationships individuals are mutually involved in "one another's biographical situations". Blumer (1969) was of the opinion that when researchers distance themselves from their subjective feelings they refuse to take the role of the respondents and to see things from their point of view. Blumer (op. cit., p.86) explained it in the following way:

To try to catch the interpretive process by remaining aloof as a so-called "objective" observer and refusing to take the role of the acting unit is to risk the worst kind of subjectivism - the objective observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his own surmises in place of catching the process as it occurs in the experience of the acting unit which uses it.
Details of establishing commonality can be found in Appendix 7.

5.3.4 Format for the Group Conversations

The first aim was to create a setting in which people naturally talk to each other about important matters. To ensure that the pupils and I were not disturbed, we were allocated a Careers room which was not used on a Tuesday morning. There was a telephone in the room and I was advised to contact the AHT should any group fail to arrive. I arranged the pupils' chairs in a semi-circle and I sat facing the group. All the chairs were of the same type. The pupils were invited to sit where they chose and to make themselves comfortable; that is, to take off any jackets, scarves or coats they might be wearing. At the beginning of each Group Conversation sufficient time was given to ensure that the pupils were physically comfortable before attempting to do anything else. Permission was sought to tape-record the session with the understanding that only I would hear the tape and that anyone might turn off the machine at any time. Some were disappointed that not even they would hear the recording but I had not considered that possibility and had not allowed time for it. I then ascertained if the group members went about together in school or whether they had simply come together for the purpose of the research.

It was important to try to ensure that the pupils felt
relatively relaxed and as much at ease as possible because, when the interview situation is designed to resemble laboratory conditions people seldom share their true feelings and opinions as Deutscher (1973, p.150) noted:

Real expressions of attitudes or overt behaviour rarely occur under conditions of sterility which are deliberately structured for the interview situation.

However, it would be naïve to assume that openness and honesty naturally follow from having been made welcome and reasonably comfortable. Goffman (1959) demonstrated that people try to present themselves to outsiders in the best possible light and that they talk about those aspects of themselves which they consider others will view favourably and conceal, or underplay, their unfavourable aspects. This view was endorsed by Douglas (1976). Furthermore, Deutscher (1973) argued that conversations with respondents are subject to the same deceptions, distortions, exaggerations and fabrications which characterise talk between any people. I was, additionally, very much aware that pupils quickly learn the rules of the classroom and try to give teachers the answers they think will be favourably received. Much of the work that goes on in class involves the pupil in trying to work out what is in the teacher's mind and supplying the appropriate information. I was alerted, therefore, to the fact that pupils might use the same yardstick in the Group Conversations. They are not accustomed to being asked their own opinions and soon realise that, even in lessons such as Social Education, some opinions are more acceptable than others. Teachers exert pressure on pupils to conform to
their expectations and, in turn, pupils become expert at adjusting and accommodating to the different standards demanded by their many teachers. Another major influence which operates in school is that of the peer group and I was conscious of the fact only certain behaviours are allowed in public if pupils are to maintain their credibility within the group. Therefore, the pupils' responses might allow me to see how they viewed their world and how they behaved but there might be a considerable discrepancy between what they said and what they actually did. This problem was summed up by Benny and Hughes (1970, p.137):

Every conversation has its own balance of revelation and concealment of thoughts and intentions. Only under very unusual circumstances is talk so completely expository that every word can be taken at face value.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p.52) added:

Although the words people use lend insight into the meanings they attach to things, it is naive to presume that the intricacies of a social setting can be revealed by vocabulary alone.

It was necessary, therefore, to pay attention to the tone of voice and to observe the body language used by the pupils.

I also remembered the advice given by Kelly (1969, p.229):

Listen to the speaker's theme - stop wondering what the words literally mean. Try to recall what they sound like.

When the social niceties had been attended to and the group was settled, the pupils and I attempted to develop commonality concerning the word 'stress'. This was followed
by considering the sorts of general situations which might result in stress. Once it was decided that common ground had been established, the conversation moved on to consider the sorts of stressful situations first year pupils might encounter in school and how they might cope with them. Afterwards the pupils and I examined the situations which were stressful for second year pupils. I had found in the Pilot Study that there was very little difference between the responses of the different groups up to this stage of the conversation. Therefore, the amount of time allocated to this section was much shorter than in the Pilot Study and was determined by the responses of the particular group. The analysis of the Group Conversations in the Pilot Study revealed that the greatest diversity of response occurred in the examination of coping behaviours. Therefore, approximately two-thirds of the time was now allocated to examining the pupils' choice and evaluation of coping strategies. At the end of each Group Conversation I enquired whether I should have asked anything else.

5.4 FINDINGS FROM THE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

Details of the allocation of time and the pupil groupings can be found in Appendix 8.

5.4.1 Group Interaction

There was a tendency for those pupils in 2X, whom I had not met in Social Education, to be rather reticent at the
beginning of the Group Conversation but usually they became more talkative as the conversation developed. There were no other major differences in this respect between the groups formed by the two classes.

All groups were able to answer the research questions but some groups and some individuals answered more fully than others. This was due, in part, to the fact that several groups were accustomed to going about in school as a unit and were quite comfortable with each other. Furthermore, some had already talked together about a number of the topics we discussed in the group.

Having discovered in the Pilot Study that girls and boys spoke about stress in different ways when they were in the group situation, I was interested to find out if the same, or other, differences between girls and boys were apparent in this phase of the research.

5.4.2 Differences between Girls' Groups and Boys' Groups

Several variations were evident in the ways in which girls and boys related to each other in the course of the Group Conversation. Generally, the girls tended to look at other group members for support and this was usually supplied. For example, they endorsed each other's remarks, they followed up on what someone else had said, they questioned each other's opinions and reviewed their own in the light of previous utterances. The atmosphere in many of the girls' groups was most conducive to sharing important information
about themselves. For instance, they tended to encourage each other by smiling, engaging in eye contact and nodding in agreement with the speaker. They addressed each other and could frequently talk together on the topic for some time, without my saying anything. They were able to identify with each other, although they did not necessarily agree with what was said. In addition, there was considerably more laughter among the girls than among the boys.

Two groups of four girls were close friends in school but always split into the same twos when smaller units were required. This was accounted for in each case by the fact that two girls were "best friends". There was much talk among girls of best friends but no boy mentioned having one. Best friends could be an enormous source of comfort and support but, conversely, they could also be a source of stress if relationships between them became strained. Boys were more inclined to say that they had "lots of friends" but were sometimes hard pressed to name them. Few girls had this problem which suggests that friendship for girls is of a different order from that for boys.

The boys in 2X and 2Y were decidedly more willing than those in the Pilot Study to admit that they experienced stress. However, I did not consider that they made it very easy for each other to be forthcoming. They did not seem to look to the other group members for support and did not appear to receive it. They rarely encouraged a member of the group to
enlarge on what he had said; his remarks were given little or no validation by the others. Frequently a boy's verbal offering fell into a void and he received no feedback whatsoever from the other group members. Rather, there was a tendency for them to allow one boy to finish what he had to say before another took up the conversation, frequently with no reference to what had gone before. This would suggest that girls listen to each other in a different way from boys and with different intentions. The boys did not often address each other, preferring to direct their comments at me or at no one in particular. Some of the boys sat forward in their chairs, their elbows resting on their knees, looking at the floor; no girl sat like that. Although they did smile and laugh, these gestures were usually not directed towards the other group members. There was little eye contact and a tendency to look away when it did take place. Girls, on the other hand, were more inclined to maintain eye contact and to smile when looked at. The atmosphere in the boys' groups was generally more serious than that in the girls' groups.

As a result of these perceived differences, I considered that my role in the conversation should differ according to whether I was talking with girls or boys. With girls it was often sufficient simply to lean forward in my chair or nod or raise my eyebrows or smile or engage in some other non-verbal communication for the girls to enlarge on what they had said. With boys, on the other hand, it was more necessary to encourage them verbally and to put into words
exactly what I wanted to know. This might have been because there was less eye contact and, therefore, fewer opportunities to indulge in non-verbal communication. When talking with boys I considered that I was involved in the "emotional housework" described by Hite (1988, p.50). This meant that I, generally, did the encouraging and affirming for the whole group and frequently the conversation was between the speaker and myself, the others having to be drawn in by me.

Although there was very little difference in the amount said by girls' groups compared with boys' groups, the actual structure of the conversations was quite different. Most of the girls in a group took part in one interconnected conversation; they meshed together. The boys, on the other hand, seemed to have several conversations on the same theme but with little personal connection; broadly speaking, each stood alone within his group. The general absence of rapport between the boys would do little, in my opinion, to encourage them to risk sharing important personal information. Certainly, under such circumstances, I should not have cared to reveal my fears and concerns.

Clearly, some groups, regardless of sex, supported each other and gelled better than others and several boys were much more articulate and willing to talk than some girls. It must be made quite clear, therefore, that the above observations were generalisations and were not applicable to each individual group.
The ability of group members to interact well with each other depended not only on how comfortable they felt with each other and with myself but more importantly, with themselves. One particular group displayed great difficulties in their inter-personal relationships.

5.4.3 Dynamics within One Group

I had asked that the pupils arrange themselves in groups of two, three or four. A group of five girls presented themselves one morning, the extra one saying that the two girls in her original group did not want her. In any case, she added, the girls in this group were her friends. Rather reluctantly I agreed to see the group of five. Two of them said nothing unless spoken to and then answered, usually after a pause, in monosyllables. These two looked decidedly uncomfortable and seemed to shrink into their chairs as they stared at the floor, avoiding eye contact not only with me but also with the others in the group. A third girl giggled much of the time and was joined periodically by the rest. Conversation during these episodes was impossible. The remaining two girls spent the time complaining, in detail, about specific teachers, about the school in general and the unfairness of the subject choice for third year. One of those two included her parents in her endless list of grievances which produced embarrassed glances from the others but she appeared unaware of them. The other girl (the one who had attached herself to the group) claimed, in
a self-righteous voice, that her mother was her ally against the dreadful school system. When I tried to involve the mainly silent duo in the conversation, either the giggler giggled or the moaners answered for them. Regardless of my question, or any attempt to re-direct the conversation, the aggrieved pair viewed every opening as an opportunity to reiterate their complaints. The conversation went round in circles and everything and everyone was seen in negative, pre-emptive and constellatory ways. All their coping strategies involved battering, kicking or shooting people and these were evaluated as being not merely the only way of coping but perfectly legitimate coping behaviours. I was unable to persuade these two girls to talk about themselves, or their role in their unhappy lot, other than as spotless lambs in an unfair, unjust system peopled by teachers who picked on them and made life hard for them. When the five girls had gone, I found that my group lists, which I had left on a cupboard by the door, were missing. By a stroke of good fortune I found them crumpled up in a dustbin at the end of the corridor. They had been put there, presumably, by one of the gang of five, perhaps to demonstrate what she thought of the project.

Details of establishing sociality and commonality can be found in Appendix 9.

5.4.4 Summary of Pupils' Responses

A number of school situations was readily identified by pupils as being stressful. By far the most common source of
stress was bullying, which was mentioned by all 19 groups. Boys cited a greater number of examples and were more subject to physical bullying than girls, although the consequences of any kind of bullying were equally unpleasant for girls and boys. Bullying was generally directed towards members of the same sex and boys who bullied girls were often ridiculed by other boys for having to "come down to the level of girls". Some individuals (usually boys) were commonly known as bullies. According to the pupils, these people spent much of their time intimidating younger, smaller individuals in the hope of being accepted by other pupils (often in the year above) who had a reputation for being "hard". Several groups identified a number of these bullies who were described as having little interest in the academic side of school life and who ridiculed those who had. Many, it was said, were all right on their own but a Jekyll and Hyde-like transformation took place when they were with their friends. When I asked the groups why they thought these pupils found it necessary to bully, the reply was usually that they did not really know, but that they probably did it because they were "unhappy" and wanted to appear "big". Pupils who were identified by their classmates as being bullies usually gave unhappiness as a reason for bullying, but they neither admitted to being unhappy nor to being a bully. Although a small number of boys admitted to picking on younger pupils, the episodes they described were reported in a light-hearted manner. They said that they were "only playing", that they meant no harm and as they had been picked on in first year, it was
perfectly legitimate for them to carry on the tradition. It was just "something that happened". Even when they admitted to disliking some of the treatment they had received as first year pupils they condoned their own behaviour because it was "only a joke", they "did not mean it". Although the groups described and identified bullies in 2X and 2Y not one individual put her or himself in that category. Interestingly, it was very often those whom I had been told were bullies who had the most to say on the subject but they failed, or refused, to see their own reflection in the bullies they described in detail.

Bullying was especially difficult to deal with when it was sudden and unprovoked. Several pupils, mainly boys, had experienced this particular problem and Paul's story is contained in Appendix 10.

Verbal bullying, or slagging as the pupils referred to it, was a common, insidious problem which every group discussed. It was so much part of school life that it was taken for granted. The majority of pupils no longer told a member of staff about it (unless it became unbearable) because it frequently exacerbated the problem and the pupil being slagged was additionally seen as a "grass" and a "baby" for "telling the teacher". Furthermore, the pupils said that many teachers gave the impression of being too busy to be bothered with mere name calling. Josephine, a friendly girl with an open expression on her face, cited an example of this problem:
J. There's this girl in our class - she's a wally really and is always being picked on. She used to tell the teacher but he got fed up with her and shouted at her and told her she was old enough to stand up for herself - but it wasn't fair because she doesn't know how to. I tried to be friends with her but I got picked on when I was with her so I stopped talking to her. It's bad, really but I didn't want to be slagged.

Most slagging, therefore, went unreported but, if experienced over a period of time, had the effect of greatly undermining a pupil's self confidence. Catherine, an articulate, self-possessed member of the group stated, in a resigned tone, that slagging was an evil that everyone had to put up with:

C. Slagging goes on all the time. Nobody escapes but some people are slagged more than others. It's worse if there's a whole gang slagging you. It can affect the whole dimension of what you do - it can make you feel really insecure. The people who slag you probably don't remember what they said but it goes round and round in your head, sometimes for days - you can really believe that what they say is true and it affects everything about you.

Further examples of verbal bullying are cited in Appendix 11.

Although bullying was most usually carried out by pupils, some teachers were considered to be bullies and one particular teacher was mentioned by several groups. Georgina, a small, nervous, fair-haired girl with a big smile, was still smarting from a verbal assault which had taken place the previous day. Her experience, along with that of Florence, is described in Appendix 12.
Stress arising from being bullied was aggravated by the pupils having little understanding, or control, of the situation. Often they did not know why they were being bullied and so could think of no way to deal with it. Frequently they did not know whether the verbal threats would develop into physical violence. In other words, they did not understand the game that was being played and had no control over the moves. Anne, described by others as being very bright, gave a very lucid explanation of this situation:

A. You've got to play the bullies at their own game - get ahead of them, anticipate their moves, get there before them and cut them off. It's like playing chess. When you do that they leave you alone because they know you'll beat them.

Pupils frequently found each other stressful for reasons other than bullying. The group of five girls described in section 5.4.3 was a source of stress for all the pupils in 2Y. The girls' behaviour, it was said, was constantly directed towards agitation and disharmony. Their stance towards pupils, teachers and even each other was antagonistic. Both girls and boys complained about them for various reasons. Details of the pupils' comments can be found in Appendix 13.

More girls than boys mentioned arguments as a source of stress. These arguments were usually with best friends and involved the girls in not speaking to each other. They described the resultant sense of isolation and the feelings of loneliness and vulnerability. There was frequently a
rush to replace the best friend with another, partly as a protection against the outside world but mainly to show the person with whom they had argued that they were not solely reliant on her for friendship. It was rather important to be the first to find a new friend and Jessica, who had been "dumped" in first year, spoke of how painful and devastating it was to have been replaced by another:

J. We argued over something really silly and didn't speak for a few days. I thought we'd just get back together again but she went off with Clare and Clare didn't speak to me either. It was terrible - everything felt as if it had been turned upside down. I thought I'd never be happy again. I couldn't eat and didn't want to come to school - I thought everybody was looking at me and I couldn't get on with my work.

She related the above account very slowly, looking at the floor and sometimes shaking her head at the memory. When she finished she looked up, smiled at everyone and said very quickly:

J. But I've got over that and I'm happy - I'm best friends with Kate (one of the group) now.

Some girls said that they felt exposed being on their own and that not having a best friend affected everything about them, from their self-esteem to how they performed in class. On occasions, there was a sense of relief when the relationship was over. Sometimes negative, destructive friendships were prolonged long after they had ceased to be nourishing and healthy because a bad relationship was frequently considered to be better than no relationship.

Too much or too little homework was stressful for several
pupils. Some considered that they would not do well in examinations if they did not have homework every weekday evening. Others thought that they would pass if they worked consistently in class. Most, however, said that a lack of homework was not so much a source of stress for them as it was for their parents, who liked them to work at home for an hour or two five days a week. Some claimed that their parents rang their friends to find out how long their children spent on homework and then arguments ensued if the child of the telephoned parent worked longer hours. Parents were not convinced by the argument that some classes were given more homework than others. A high number of girls said that they spent longer on homework than they wanted because pressure was put on them to do so by parents. Anna reported that her mother, on looking through her homework for Mathematics, became quite worried and upset because she could not understand the section on Bearings and Coordinates. Anna, however, failed to understand her mother's agitation because:

A. I wasn't even asking her to help me. If I needed help I'd ask Melanie. As it was, I'd to try and explain it to my mum but I don't know why she wanted to know!

It was interesting to note that several pupils, mainly those who claimed to have little interest in academic work, said that pupils who did well in class and in tests did so only because their parents forced them. When I suggested that perhaps the pupils themselves wanted to do well, Euan, who prided himself on being 'laid-back' said nothing but looked at me with an expression which I interpreted as, "Well, if
you want to believe that!"

Getting bad marks in tests was a source of stress for some pupils mainly because of the anger and disappointment felt by parents and the subsequent pressure to work harder. Many pupils had learned from bitter experience to mention tests at home only after they had taken place and the pupil had done relatively well. There was, however, the risk that parents would find out about unreported tests from other parents.

It was interesting to learn that a high number of pupils tried to shield their parents from the day-to-day problems and disappointments they experienced. Many said that it was simpler to confide in a friend and not to tell parents who tended to worry, which often did little to help the child. Kenneth, who was a cheery, smiling boy explained the problem for another member of the group who was having difficulty putting his thoughts into words:

K. What he means is - some mums try to get everything right for you and when you get picked on or something, they think, "Oh no! What have I done to deserve this?" They get fussy and instead of having one problem you have two. Whether you tell your parents things or not really depends on the sort of mum you've got.

Several pupils said that it was an effort to come to school each morning and that they felt sick and frightened but could not pinpoint their fears. Some had feigned illness in order to stay at home but, when their mothers found that there was nothing physically wrong, they were sent to
school. As the day progressed these pupils usually became more positive and relaxed but often felt equally anxious and pessimistic the following morning. When two boys arrived for their Group Conversation one of them, Peter, looked tired and sounded as if everything was a great effort. His story is described in Appendix 14.

There were marked socio-economic differences between the intake of the Pilot Study school and the present school. Over 65% of the pupils in the present school came from owner-occupied homes. Broadly speaking, the pupils in this school were better dressed, as judged by the cleanliness and general state of their clothes, than those in the Pilot Study. Considerably fewer pupils in this school, compared with the Pilot Study, complained of being called a "tramp" for wearing the 'wrong' clothes. However, this did not mean that there were no problems in the area of dress. In common with the Pilot Study, the present school did have a uniform but wearing it was not compulsory. As a result, very few pupils actually wore uniform and this proved to be stressful both for those who did and those who did not. Both girls and boys were very critical of each other's clothes and there was considerable competition among the pupils. The experiences of Hannah and Alice can be found in Appendix 15.

Some pupils reported that they had become involved with a bad crowd when they first came to school and that getting away from them had, in some instances, been rather difficult. Alan, who came across as an articulate, down-to-
earth boy, spoke at length about how he had been affected by this problem. He gave a most thoughtful description of the difficulties he had faced and the courage it had taken to deal with the problem. Furthermore, he displayed considerable insight for a boy of his age:

A. I started to go around with these boys and fell behind with my work. I got a bad report and after getting it reviewed I was put on report. I got a shock because I didn't think I was that bad. It meant that I had to have this card signed by the teacher at the end of every lesson. I decided I had to break away from the other boys because they wouldn't be there at the end of the day when I needed to get a job. It was hard because they slagged me all the time. There was quite a bit of pressure from some girls in the class to stay on report. I knew I needed help to get off report and spoke to the teachers about it. They were really good and realised I was trying to improve. Only one wouldn't listen. Some other people need to get away from bad influences and I've told them and they can see it too but they're too weak.

Both having the same teachers and changing teachers from first to second year was stressful for some pupils. Changing teachers could be difficult because of having to become accustomed to different standards and ways of working. Having the same teacher could pose problems for those pupils who wanted to turn over a new leaf. The experiences of Edward, William and Alexander can be found in Appendix 16.

Teachers who shout were seen by some to be a source of stress. Fred, a small boy with lots of freckles, a rather serious expression and a great deal to say, reported what he meant by this:

F. The maths teacher shouts when I get the review sheet marked and everyone looks and I feel so bad that I can't
hear what she's saying. Sometimes I know she's asking me a question but I don't know what it is because all I can see is the class staring at me, so she shouts even louder. I can only listen when the class goes back to work again. Why can't she see what she's doing? I feel so bad when people look at me like that.

Several pupils said that they found it stressful being shouted at in class because the others looked at them and they felt stupid because there was nothing they could other than answer back or sit there and take it. June explained why shouting was so stressful for her:

J. My mum and dad are always shouting at each other and at us. They say they're going to get a divorce which would probably be a good idea because all they do is shout. I come to school to forget about the rows at home and to think about other things but when some teachers start shouting I could scream. It's not what they say - I don't care about that - sometimes I don't know what they're saying - it's just the noise - it really gets on my nerves. In some ways it's worse at school because at least at home you can walk out and go to your bedroom but at school you're trapped in the classroom.

Leona, who was in the same group as June, was the quietest of the trio. She was a tall, thin girl whose anger quite startled me as she vehemently described the similarity between squabbling parents and teachers who shout:

L. I quite like school actually but I don't like Maths. I don't get on with the teacher and she shouts at me for talking and it's just like being back at home with my mum and dad. I hate all that shouting and nagging. She just won't be quiet - she shouts and bawls. I grip the edge of the table to stop myself from shouting back at her - I feel very, very angry. She's smaller than me and I just want to slap her because she's so boring and doesn't make maths any fun.

All groups in class 2Y felt the negative effects (both socially and academically) of being in the same class as the five girls mentioned in section 5.4.3 and some considered
that the school had not done enough to make them toe the line. Pupils in both classes mentioned disruptive pupils as a source of stress much more frequently and in much more detail than those in the Pilot Study. Similarly, teachers who were poor communicators of their subject or poor disciplinarians were sources of stress for many pupils. Further details of these stressors are contained in Appendix 17.

Although the problem of disruptive pupils and poor disciplinarians was identified by pupils in the Pilot Study, the long term effect was usually outweighed by the short term fun it provided. In the present school, many more pupils took a long term view and spoke about the deleterious effects that this sort of problem might have, not only on second year work and their overall school results but also on their future careers.

A frequently reported source of stress involved teachers who would not listen to the pupil's point of view. Teachers complained, they said, and often the pupils did not really understand what they had done. Yet, questioning was usually considered to be either deliberate provocation or insolence. Perhaps the pupil did not possess the appropriate social skills to deal with the situation or perhaps the teacher felt too threatened to handle the pupil's question. Resentment tended to set in and the pupil frequently did not want to take part in the lesson which further exasperated the teacher. Both Jack and Leonard spoke about their
unsatisfactory experiences with staff and their comments can be found in Appendix 18.

Much of the stress which arose from defective relationships with staff was exacerbated by the fact that the pupils felt they were in a relatively powerless position and that any attempt to deal with the problem was seen by many teachers as subversive. A feeling of being misunderstood often resulted. This could affect the pupils' attitude to and standard of work which, in turn, could endorse the teacher's opinion that the pupils needed to be quashed even further.

All pupils agreed that second year was generally less stressful than first year. As they were no longer the youngest and smallest they were less likely to be at the mercy of older pupils. In addition, their understanding of the culture of the school had grown and a certain amount of sociality and commonality had developed between themselves and staff, making it easier for them to predict and control events. The one area of second year which a number of pupils found more stressful than first year concerned academic work. It was said that many teachers were much more demanding and it came as a rude awakening for some who were having to apply themselves more diligently. Several, who were having to work much harder, worried that they were incapable of achieving the higher standard which was expected in second year. The worries about actual work, however, were minor compared with those concerning poor relationships with staff. In almost every case the stress
resulting from work could be alleviated by an understanding teacher. Conversely, pupils who had been successful and enjoyed a subject often found that the standard of their work deteriorated and their pleasure was marred when subsequently faced with a teacher whose approach they found unsympathetic.

The choice of coping strategy depended on a variety of factors including the physical state of the pupil. For example, many complained of feeling tired although most did not report going to bed very late during the week. This might suggest that the tiredness of which they spoke had more to do with their psychological/emotional condition than with anything physical. Whatever the reason, their fatigue meant that much of their energy was needed to cope with themselves, leaving little available to deal with extraneous problems. Charles complained of frequently feeling tired in the morning and his comments are in Appendix 19.

In addition to the physical state of the pupil, the psychological frame of mind also played a crucial role in the way the pupil coped with a stressful situation. For example, when pupils were affirmed they were likely to experience enhanced self-esteem and were thus enabled to cope in a more positive way than if their self-confidence had been in question in the first place. Sylvia, who displayed an exceptional ability, for a 13 year old, to analyse and articulate her perceptions of stress and coping, spoke on this topic and her comments (along with those of
Victoria) can be found in Appendix 20.

Many pupils spoke about the need for success in some area of their lives in order to balance out the failures in other areas. Most pupils succeeded at something but a minority, they claimed, seemed to be good at nothing and they were given a hard time by both teachers and pupils. These pupils, it was said, reached the stage where they did not expect to succeed and when they failed they were ridiculed. Pupils (mainly boys) who described such people often admitted to adding to the scorn but excused themselves on the grounds that "everybody does it" or by shifting the responsibility, "they (the failures) expect it". No pupil who described such failures put her or himself in that category.

Several pupils were aware that when things went well in one area there was a likelihood that the success would spill over to other unrelated areas. Conversely, they said that there was a tendency to expect failure when a number of events had gone badly in the course of a day and some were aware that this expectation had an uncanny knack of being fulfilled when they were in a negative frame of mind. Several pupils recognised that their ability to cope well was adversely affected when they encountered a series of setbacks. Some spoke of being unable to think straight and of even doubting their ability to deal effectively with everyday situations which normally would present no problem. This, in turn, made some of them irritable and touchy and
they often imagined that others were aware of their inadequacies. Under these circumstances several spoke of feeling angry and annoyed at themselves and saw themselves as failures whilst others said that they felt angry and annoyed at others and tended to vent their wrath on other people.

The ability to reflect on and assess a stressful situation was easier after the event was over. A few pupils, with very little prompting from me, were able to describe in detail their perceptions of a situation, including their ways of coping with it. Several reported an ability to see the situation differently once it was over and claimed that their perspective had been distorted when actively engaged in dealing with the problem. Many were of the opinion that coping effectively with a situation, no matter how painful at the time, was better than not having had the experience. Some said that, as a result, they had been able to help others who suffered similar stressors, whilst others reported that they were able to cope better with stressors, in general, as a result of the experience.

A minority of pupils, for whom the source of stress was another person, spoke of trying to understand the situation from the other person's point of view. Anne described how she did this in her attempts to cope with bullying:

A. It's a bit of a game really. I try to work out what's in the person's mind - what they're getting out of the bullying. You've got to be cleverer than them and beat them at their own game. You don't have to bully them -
maybe you just give clever answers that they don't understand. They usually leave you alone then and move on to bully someone else. I watch these games being played and some people just don't know what to do - they don't really know what's happening and so the bullies win.

Mohammed spoke about learning the same approach with his parents and then applying it to his teachers. His comments (along with those of Fred) can be found in Appendix 21.

One group of boys discussed the use of a third party to help deal with a bully. George explained how this might work:

G. If you're being picked on and you have a friend who's friends with the bully, he could ask him why he's picking on you and tell him to lay off.

Although no one in George's group had used his suggested coping strategy they agreed that it might work for the reason given by Leonard:

L. Usually when people bully other people it's because they don't really know them. They might be in the same class as them but they still don't know them. If your friend spoke to the bully you might get to know him and he'd stop bullying you.

Several pupils spoke of using older siblings, not so much to enquire about any reasons for bullying, but to threaten the bully should anything happen to the younger sister or brother. Generally, this approach seemed to work and was considered to be a good coping strategy because no one was physically hurt and the bullying usually stopped.

Some spoke of trying to cope by avoiding having to deal with the stressful situation. Marie and Irene said they were
best friends, that they were not very bright and that they did not like having to answer in any class. They often giggled and shifted about a great deal as they spoke. However, despite their apparent embarrassment they were quite happy to talk and spoke mainly about their efforts to appear 'invisible' in class. Their comments on this aspect of coping are contained in Appendix 22.

Pupils often said that they did nothing to cope with a situation because they could not think of anything that they would do. This is not the same as saying they could not think of anything to do. Frequently they could suggest coping strategies but as they did not fit in with the image they held of themselves they were not prepared to implement them. Noreen's comments on this topic can be found in Appendix 23.

Many more boys than girls said that they cultivated an image of studied indifference as a way of coping. Several boys explained that it was of great importance that the onlooker should think that nothing bothered them and Jason, who seemed to spend a great deal of time at this endeavour, as judged by the priority he gave the topic, explained how the image he had of himself precluded certain coping behaviours:

J. There's this teacher who gets excited and shouts when we don't do his boring work. Sometimes I want to shout back but I don't - I just sit and smile as if I'm not bothered and he goes mental.

In encounters which involved another person, the choice of coping strategy depended on the pupil's previous experience.
with the person concerned. Juliet spoke with excitement as if this were a game. She clarified how she had learnt to cope with teachers:

J. If some teachers tell you off, you just have to take it or you'll get lines or a letter home - but others you can have a joke with, as long as you don't go too far - then there are some that are so soft you can say terrible things and they just take it. You've got to learn what you can get away with and then you know how to cope with them.

Some pupils spoke of how they coped with new situations and new people. Most suggested that they approached the situation or individual with caution and that they waited to see what was going to happen before taking action or voicing their opinions. Several said that, as far as meeting new people was concerned, it depended whether they were with friends or on their own. If they were with friends they were less likely to be inhibited and were less interested in what the newcomer(s) thought of them. On their own, however, with no one to affirm them, they were more cautious. A small minority spoke of trying to equate the situation or stranger with a similar situation or person already encountered. Mohammed's and Catherine's comments on this way of coping are contained in Appendix 24.

Many pupils spoke at length about the problems of being in a class where a number of pupils were disruptive and the teacher neither succeeded in disciplining them nor made much effort to teach those who wanted to work. Michelle was typical of those who complained and her experience is described in Appendix 25.
As well as the physical and psychological states of the pupil, the physical and psychological states of the other person had to be considered when choosing a coping strategy. Richard said that school was all right but that he would leave at the age of 16 if he could find a job. He said that he enjoyed some subjects but did not like teachers who were "too serious". He described the need to ascertain how the teacher was feeling before deciding how to behave in class:

R. If the teacher starts shouting as soon as they get in the door you can tell they're in a bad mood and you don't do anything silly or you'll get lines. There's always somebody, though, who acts the fool and gets caught. That's not so bad if the teacher just gives them lines but sometimes they punish everybody and that's just not funny.

In the case of bullying, factors such as the number of people involved, whether the bully was alone or with friends, whether the person bullied was alone or with friends, whether the pupil cared about the opinion of the person who was bullying, were all important. In other words, what was personally involved for the pupil was the crucial deciding factor in determining the choice of coping strategy.

If a coping strategy had been successful on a previous occasion it was more likely to be used again. On the other hand, unsuccessful coping strategies were frequently repeated as Margaret, who had a tendency to be rather brusque, was quick to admit:
M. My mum says I'm right minded - even when I'm wrong and I know it, I go on as if I'm right and it gets me in trouble. I've always got to have the last word in an argument. I'm always arguing with the English teacher and she goes wild and gives me lines but it doesn't stop me. I know I should just be quiet but I can't. I've just got to get it out. I wasn't always like it - I've got worse this year so I hope I'll get better next year.

Pupils appeared to have a general style of coping which was applied to a variety of situations. For example, some pupils said that they never, or rarely ever, answered back if provoked, whilst others said they always, or almost always, did. Some tended to act first and think later whilst others (mainly girls) said that they thought so much that they often did not get round to taking any action. Others said that their way of coping was to do nothing in the hope that whatever was troubling them went away whilst others said that they tended to take avoiding action rather than face whatever was stressing them. As demonstrated above, successful coping strategies were consciously re-applied to similar situations but there was little conscious thought that a particular coping strategy which had worked well in one situation could be tried in another situation. Alice spoke on this subject:

A. I know that I have learned to cope with tests by telling myself that they are only tests and it's not the end of the world if I fail. That has helped - before I used to get really worried and feel shivery and sick - now I just feel worried. I don't think I've ever tried to do that with other things that stress me.

It was interesting to note that many pupils admitted using, over and over again, a number of coping strategies that they did not consider to be good ways of dealing with a
situation. Simon, who had been in care and had attended a very small school for emotionally maladjusted pupils before coming to the present school, said that he was often in trouble with teachers for poor work and answering back. Simon's coping strategies and his evaluation of them can be found in Appendix 26, along with the comments of Josephine. She demonstrated that even coping strategies which had 'worked' were not always considered to be good.

Although good and poor copers interpreted many things similarly, the personal ramifications of particular coping strategies were sharply distinguished and it was these personal ramifications which were critical, rather than aspects of coping which have nothing to do with the personal.

Most people agreed that talking was probably the best way to help them cope more effectively. Many of the girls' groups said that they had enjoyed talking and several asked if there would be an opportunity to repeat the group experience. They explained that being able to talk had helped to see situations more clearly. The majority of pupils said that it was easier to talk with one other person rather than with a group of people and that the composition of a group was very important. It was also essential to have someone who could be trusted to keep confidences. Most girls had a best friend or relative in whom they confided but a great many boys had no one. A few boys suggested that they did not need anyone because they did not have anything
that required discussion. Two boys even said that nothing bothered them and that sessions such as these were all right for those who needed them but they did not fall into that category. Interestingly, these two boys were quite talkative in the Group Conversation and cited several examples of stress but claimed to have experienced none of them. The above comments made by boys were said in a casual sort of way but there was an irritation in their tone as well as a finality which I took to mean that they did not want to discuss this point any further.

Some pupils said that a friend occasionally suggested ways to cope with a stressor but they frequently found that they could cope more effectively simply by being allowed to talk about their situation. Talking seemed to take the problem out of the fog and give it a distinct shape which often made it more manageable and enabled the pupil to see it differently. For this reason friends were often confided in rather than parents who were inclined to take over the problem and deal with it in a way which often did not suit the pupil. Ruth described how she was helped by confiding in her friend:

R. Sometimes there's nothing anyone can do to help but if you can just talk about what's bothering you, you sometimes feel better. I used to talk to Susan (one of the group) when my mum and dad were getting a divorce and that helped me. It didn't stop them getting a divorce but I think I'd have gone mad if I hadn't been able to tell Susan. Everything used to build up inside me until I thought I'd burst and then I'd just talk and talk to Susan - I felt better then but I don't know how she put up with me!
Many pupils said that they would not mind discussing hypothetical cases of stress and coping in groups but that they would be very wary about what they revealed about themselves, not only to each other but to members of staff. Edward gave his reasons for saying this:

E. I could always batter a pupil who used any evidence against me but there's nothing I could if a teacher betrayed me. I can think of some teachers I definitely wouldn't say anything in front of - they already say things to the class about other pupils.

In theory, the school had a well organised pastoral system. The majority of pupils spoke highly of the school and generally considered that relationships between themselves and staff were good. This opinion was shared most widely by the academically ambitious pupils. However, many of those for whom school held little academic attraction agreed that most staff were fair and had the pupils' interests at heart. Much dissatisfaction, however, was felt towards one particular Senior House Counsellor, the details of which can be found in Appendix 27.

5.4.5 Summary of Phase Two

The Group Conversations were conducted on Tuesday mornings throughout the Spring term. Four groups were seen each week and each conversation lasted 30 minutes which, for most groups, was not long enough to do justice to the research questions. I consider that an additional 15 minutes for each group would have ensured better coverage of my questions. However, as judged by the findings in the Pilot
Study, more detailed and personal data emerged from the Individual Conversations and I regarded this phase of the study as a preparation for the more important Individual Conversations.

Generally, sources of stress were similar for pupils in both the Pilot Study and in the present school. However, the pupils in 2X and 2Y were much more concerned with school work than the pupils in the Pilot Study school. The pupils in the present school placed greater emphasis on harmony in the classroom and were rather concerned when progress was hindered because the teacher’s time was spent trying to discipline unruly pupils. Although pupils in the Pilot Study and in the present school found disruptive pupils and poor teachers a source of stress, they presented a much greater problem for the pupils in 2X and 2Y, as judged by the number of occasions these particular stressors were mentioned and the details they gave. Parents (mainly mothers) were mentioned as a source of advice and help regarding school work more frequently than in the Pilot Study school.

Throughout the term I continued to attend Social Education lessons after morning break on a Tuesday and left school at the beginning of the afternoon session. In this way I continued social relations with staff and pupils during morning coffee and lunch.

5.5 PHASE THREE: INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS
It was originally intended that Phase Three would follow straight on from Phase Two and that it would take place during the Summer term of the pupils' second year. This would have allowed me sufficient time to analyse the data from the Group Conversations and to prepare follow-up questions for individual pupils. This plan, however, could not be implemented at the intended time owing to the fact that I was ill. As a consequence, the Individual Conversations took place one year after the Group Conversations, during the Spring term of the pupils' third year.

The moratorium provided the opportunity for the thesis to develop from a cross-sectional study to one which allowed developments over time to be examined. The same two classes, which had become 3X and 3Y, participated in the extended research programme. The ways in which the whole world of third year pupils had changed were examined rather than tracing particular changes in individuals. I was interested in finding answers to the following questions:

(i) In what ways are the sources of stress in third year the same as, or different from, those in second year?

(ii) In what ways are the coping behaviours used in third year the same as, or different from, those in second year?

(iii) What are the reasons for any change?

5.5.1 Method of Data Analysis

I chose to analyse the data for changes over time by looking
at the trends across years two and three rather than by examining changes in individuals during that time. I have not separated the variables of time, age and type of conversation. It is not possible to say, therefore, whether the changes in pupils' constructs concerning stress and coping were attributable to the passage of time or to the fact that they were a year older or because they were subjected to different treatment (that is, took part in Individual rather than Group Conversations).

Details of re-negotiating entry, re-establishing relationships with the pupils and the format for the Individual Conversations are contained in Appendix 28.

5.6 FINDINGS FROM THE INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS

Details of the total number of Individual Conversations and the allocation of time can be found in Appendix 29.

5.6.1 Differences between Group and Individual Conversations

The Group Conversations produced a mixture of abstract and personal examples of stress, whereas the Individual Conversations were almost exclusively devoted to personal experiences of stress and coping. Although the themes remained consistent in the two types of conversation there was much greater emphasis, in the Individual Conversations, on the role of the individual and the detailed effects the situations had on the person concerned. In other words, the
Group Conversation produced a broader, shallower, more generalised response whilst the Individual Conversation contained more specific, deeper, personal details.

Perhaps because of the lengthy gap between Phases Two and Three of the research, there was a slight tendency, at the beginning of the Individual Conversations, for pupils to talk in a general way about stress but in all except a few cases this position changed as the conversation developed and sociality and trust were re-established. Almost all pupils said that the Individual Conversations were less daunting than the Group Conversations, despite the long gap, because they already knew me, knew what we were going to talk about and they did not have to censure their replies. No one claimed to prefer the Group Conversations but five girls reported that they had not said anything in the Individual Conversation that they would not have been willing to share in the larger group. Unlike the Group Conversations, there were fewer differences between the responses of girls and boys.

There was, however, a small sub-group of boys who said that school had become less important to them because of other outside interests. These boys were very keen to be grown up, to be men, as judged by their conversation and general demeanour. They took a pride in their appearance, were well dressed, well groomed and some wore cologne. They generally presented a front which I interpreted as meaning that they had everything under control and that nothing really
mattered to them. These boys usually took up more physical space than the others, they slouched in their chairs and placed their feet well apart. They seldom looked at me and most school topics were discussed in a cursory way. Although all these boys were very pleasant, most of their conversation was on the surface and I was left with the impression that they did not want to discuss anything in depth. They tended to make statements but showed little interest in backing them up or discussing them very far. One of these boys was proud of having a girl friend and much of his conversation revolved around her. (He was the only boy in the whole study to mention a girl friend although several girls discussed boy friends). The others, however, were keen to tell me that they were friends with older boys, some of whom had left school and two said that they spent their free time running about with their friends in cars and added, casually, that they were sometimes stopped by the police. Some were proud of their association with a local group known as the 'Casuals'. These supporters of a local football team prided themselves on being expensively dressed and some of them gloried in the reputation of being "hard men". A very small number of boys was in this sub-group but talking about stress and coping was not exactly in keeping with this picture of themselves.

The above sub-group looked down on and laughed at some of their peers whom they described with disdain as the "little boys". This second sub-group was considered to be very childish as they sat at the front of the class and still
played games in the playground. They were given to whining and moaning when picked on by teachers, instead of standing up for themselves. They had not learned how to "handle themselves" and often were given lines and detention. Such behaviour was "definitely wimpish" and not to be encouraged. The 'little boys' were alternately teased and ignored by the 'men' of the group. Although some girls were more physically and socially mature than others there did not appear to be this same polarisation among the girls as there was among the boys.

5.6.2 Pupils' Perceptions of the Group and Individual Conversations

Most pupils admitted to talking about situations, or giving specific details about situations, in the Individual Conversations that they would not have revealed to their peers. The reasons given for not sharing information in a larger group were that others might laugh at them or tell other people or use the information against them or, quite frequently, they would simply not understand. Pupils offering this last reason often did not understand their situation fully themselves, so did not expect their peers to. Many pupils had never before thought through or discussed with another person what they found stressful. For some, giving words to the stressor, naming it and describing it, removed its amorphousness and gave it a clearer, more manageable shape.

The reasons the pupils gave for being able to talk more
freely in the Individual Conversation were that they did not have to see me every day, that I had no connection with the school, that they enjoyed talking about themselves, that they felt better for having voiced their concerns and that they were able to understand certain situations better as a result of having spoken about them. A high number of girls said that they found it quite easy to talk about themselves to me because I was a woman. I was interested in comparing the Group and Individual Conversations and had not considered that the gender of the researcher might be of any significance. However, when several girls offered the above response I was prompted to ask what they thought their response might have been had the researcher been a man. I expected that the answer might be that it depended on certain qualities in the man but this was not the case. All girls who discussed this topic were unanimous that a male researcher would not have been well received. They said that it was easier to talk with a woman and that they would not have given a man the information they had given me. When I probed this response I did not get very far. It was not so much that the girls did not know or could not think of a reason for not confiding in a man, it was just something about which they were quite adamant. Some looked straight at me, shaking their heads, as they replied with certainty that they just could not, or would not, tell a man what they had told me. Josephine explained with certainty and in a voice that sounded older than her 14 years, "You just don't tell a man those things". It was not as if the situations we discussed could be regarded as 'female
topics'. No boy mentioned the fact that I was a woman as a reason for finding it easier to talk openly in the one-to-one situation. Indeed, many boys did not mention me at all but frequently said that they would not have risked sharing personal information in the group because they feared the negative reactions of their peers. Some said that it was important to "keep up a front", to "live up to your image". Euan explained what this involved:

E. I suppose we all try to create an image and some people, including teachers, work really hard at it - but you've got to make it look easy. What it means is - you can only do certain things, admit certain things. You can't look soft and maybe some folk would think I was soft if they heard what I said. If anyone asks me what I said I'll probably say, "Not much - it was quite boring". You have to.

Euan went on to say that he would face the greatest ridicule from other boys if he revealed what he said but that girls in a group, rather than on their own, would probably make fun of him as well. From similar remarks made by other boys it was clear that males were allowed fewer options in their behaviour than females and that boys were the severest critics of those who deviated, despite the fact that many boys were not happy with their limited choice of behaviours.

5.6.3 The Need for Reflection and the Ability to Analyse Situations

As well as knowing when to probe and when to leave an issue it was also necessary to gauge how long pupils were comfortable in a silence. It can be tempting to fill any break in a conversation with some sort of talk but, in order
that a certain amount of reflection could take place, it was necessary that the pupils and I allowed silences to develop. Some were more comfortable with silences than others and were able to sit and concentrate as they considered their response. Others were happier with almost constant talk and some glanced at me nervously if I did not respond instantly to their utterances. Although I frequently reiterated that there were no right or wrong answers, it was clear from the looks I received from some that they thought they had given the 'wrong answer'. It was necessary on those occasions to explain to the pupils that, as they were telling me important things which no one else had mentioned and I had not considered before, I needed a little time to think about them. This reassured some but one or two, I am sure, were not really convinced and they continued to try to read my mind and give me the 'right answer'.

It was interesting to note the ability on the part of some pupils to reflect on their situations and to talk about them in a way more mature than I would have considered possible in people of their age. Sometimes the information they gave me was so detailed and their analysis of a situation so clear that I thought they could have acquired it only by lengthy discussion or much cogitation beforehand. However, when I asked how they knew what they were telling me, the reply was usually that they were unaware that they knew until they started talking and only then had they understood the situation. For many, the mere act of putting words to a stressful situation allowed them to see it from a
perspective previously unglimped and, on occasions, this
new view allowed them to choose a different coping strategy
with which to deal with it.

Some pupils said they felt better and thanked me for helping
them when, in fact, I had done little other than listen.
Several had a specific problem that they wanted to air and,
in some of these cases, I did not ask the questions which I
had in mind but simply allowed the pupils to talk and built
on what they had to say. One particular girl told me that
she had been advised by her mother to talk over her problem
with me, although it was only vaguely connected with my
research topic. I had learned in the Pilot Study, where
this sort of situation had occurred three times, that it was
pointless trying to cover the research questions because the
pupils were so caught up in their own specific problems that
they were in no state to consider, never mind discuss, the
questions I had in mind.

A high number of pupils possessed powers of analysing and
reasoning that, I should imagine, were given little or no
opportunity for expression in the normal day-to-day
activities of the classroom, with its emphasis on the
impersonal. Certainly, in all the schools in which I taught
there was less interest in the thoughts and feelings of the
pupils than there was in their ability to pass the battery
of tests with which they were presented. Qualities such as
sensitivity to others and compassion came a very poor second
to the acquisition of hard, abstract, objective facts. Many
of the pupils in the present school described themselves as being of limited academic ability, yet they were able to construe in a mature way, to anticipate other people, their reactions and their behaviour. This, in turn, meant that they were able to understand other people's intentions, their feelings and their personal stance. As Salmon (1986) argued, the ability to construe psychologically is necessary for understanding other people and understanding other people is vital for good relationships in our society. The above author went on to suggest that viable, psychological construing is determined not so much by age as by the sorts of relationships that children have.

5.6.4 Pupils' Sources of Support

When I asked the pupils who found it relatively easy to articulate their thoughts and feelings about stress and coping where they thought they had acquired the skill, almost all replied that they had someone to "tell things to". Among the girls' confidantes were school friends, mothers, sisters, aunts, girl cousins and mothers' female friends. Some boys confided in their mothers and a few had a school friend they felt they could trust. Of the boys who were particularly articulate, all whom I asked had an older sister in whom they confided and who was often used as a point of reference in the conversation. It was interesting to note that no pupil mentioned a male member of the family as a source of support. Although most pupils lived with two parents and "parents" or "mum and dad" were frequently referred to in conversation, I found that, when I probed, it
was usually the mother who was being spoken about. For example, pupils often said that their parents could help them with a specific problem. When I asked them to tell me more about this it was almost without exception, the mother's help which was sought. Indeed, she was frequently requested not to tell the father. Fathers on their own were rarely mentioned at all.

Not all pupils, however, gained insight by articulating their stressors and several saw all problems as focusing or hinging on one particular stressor. The stories of three such pupils, Graham, Clark and Shelley, are described in Appendix 30.

The problem of being 'different' from the others presented problems for two girls who attempted to cope by denying that the fact they were 'different', was of any importance. The stories of Tracey and Paula can be found in Appendix 31.

On many occasions pupils discussed incidents which, because of the feelings of shame they experienced and the fear of other people's ridicule and scorn, they had never articulated before. Frequently they reported feeling alone with their problem and were sure that they were the only ones to have experienced such a stressor. Others thought that they ought to be able to cope more effectively with their problems and felt ashamed that they were unable to do so. Some said that they should be better able to cope with certain stressors because they were "third years now". When
I probed this particular response many said that coping improved with age. It was regarded by some to be much like physical development; that is, something which just happened. Perhaps there is an element of truth in this notion. As people become older and experience, in the Kellyan sense, an increasing number of situations it is possible for them to develop a certain confidence and ability to cope effectively with new events as they occur.

5.6.5 Stress and the Home Situation

Some of the situations which the pupils described had taken place a considerable time ago but the emotions they evoked were as strong as if they had just happened, as judged by the details the pupils gave, the tone of voice used and the accompanying non-verbal language they displayed. Some pupils became quite animated and expressed anger at what had happened to them; others sat passively, looking into the middle distance as they related their stories in a quiet voice conveying, to me, bewildered acceptance of their situation. As they spoke, many sounded older than their 14 years. Most interesting, perhaps, was the fact that very few of the situations which produced the extreme reactions originated within school but their effects spilled over to the school situation making school, in its broadest sense, very difficult to cope with. Almost without exception, the situations giving rise to the most stress were associated with home circumstances and many pupils had no one they could talk to about the pain and suffering they were
experiencing. On some occasions the isolation they experienced resulted from the fact that they had been frequently absent from school because of domestic trouble and had lost whatever friends they originally had. Many of these poor attenders seemed older and more mature than their peers in the ways they tried to rationalise and come to terms with their stressful home situations. One such pupil was Yvonne whose story is detailed in Appendix 32.

Problems at home were mentioned during the Group Conversations but they were rarely expanded upon unless the other group members had experienced similar situations and it was clear from what was said that the members of several groups had already discussed the topic among themselves. When this was the case, the situation was described and the group concerned discussed the effect it had on their ability to cope in school. For example, one member of one group, June, was grateful to have been able to confide in her best friend, Margaret, when her parents were at loggerheads the previous term. Margaret explained that she lived with her mother, her father having left home some years ago. June described the support Margaret gave her in this way:

J. It was really bad for a while - my mum and dad were always fighting. I used to tell Margaret because she knew what it was like. I couldn't concentrate on my work and I used to cry a lot - but Margaret helped me. Things are a bit better now - at least they're not rowing all the time.

The focus of the research was stress and coping in school but frequently pupils could not talk about this without referring to the home. For some pupils all topics of
conversation came back to the home situation although the reason for this was not always clear to me. On all these occasions there were problems at home and either the pupil wanted to talk about those because they were of greater importance than anything that went on in school or because stress in school could be explained only by reference to the troubles at home. Leona, angry and close to tears, spoke about the effect her family disharmony had on her school work:

L. How can I care about French and History and all the other things? The teachers go mental because I don't always listen. How can I when I don't even know if my mum'll still be there when I go home - she keeps saying she'll leave. You can't tell anyone because it's like grassing on your own family.

Many pupils expressed the opinion that it was improper to discuss trouble at home with outsiders and this veil of secrecy and the accompanying feelings of shame and guilt made any domestic disruption even more difficult to cope with. These pupils spoke of not knowing how they would be received if their peers knew about their particular situation and many felt a degree of responsibility for their parents' poor relationship. Of the situation at home, many spoke of feeling left out, of not understanding what was going on and a small number said that they did not know what they were going home from school to find. Some came to school to get away from the constant bickering of parents and were grateful for the opportunity to try to concentrate on their work.
Details of the role of the guidance system can be found in Appendix 33.

It was most interesting to observe the transformation in the two girls who had complained at length and been so negative when I spoke with the gang of five in the Group Conversations (see section 5.4.3). When I saw them individually they looked quite different and seemed happier, more relaxed and able to smile. Both said that they were much more settled at school because life at home was more peaceful. Janet, who had been especially truculent when we last met, was relaxed and most willing to talk about the developments which had taken place in her life during the year. Janet's story, along with that of Alan, can be found in Appendix 34.

5.6.6 Differences between Second and Third Years

Without exception, all pupils found third year to be better than second year. A high number spoke of meeting new teachers and enjoying better relationships with staff who treated them with more respect and they imagined that fourth year would be even better than third year as far as pupil/teacher relationships were concerned. When I asked what they meant by "respect" I was told that it meant "being treated like an equal" or "being treated like a friend". It was interesting to note that many pupils, who reported having little interest in school and who said that they were frequently in trouble, essentially wanted to get on well
with staff. Several of these pupils were pleased to report that teachers were treating them more like adults than like naughty children and the pupils thought that they responded in a grown-up manner. Some said with pleasure that they were trusted more and given more responsibility by teachers now that they were in third year. Indeed, much of pupils' bad behaviour resulted from their feeling that they were not being treated 'properly' by staff. Owing to the great imbalance of power, weighted so firmly in the teachers' favour, many pupils considered that bad behaviour was their only way of "getting back at teachers". Some reported that they tried to talk to teachers about being treated 'improperly' but these approaches were often clumsily handled by pupils and frequently misinterpreted by staff as insolence and insubordination. The result was very often deadlock with all traces of sociality disappearing as each side made renewed efforts to achieve the 'proper' behaviour it needed.

Now that they were in third year, some boys described the additional respect they received from younger pupils. Respect in this situation meant "being looked up to" and "having people laugh at your jokes". A few boys said that they had been forced to behave in a more grown up manner than they would have liked, when younger pupils were around, because they feared their ridicule. Although a small number of girls said that teachers treated them a little better, it was mainly boys who described (some of them at great length), the need to be shown respect by both staff and
younger pupils. Some of these pupils, in their desperation to achieve this all-important respect, resorted to aggression when it was denied them.

In second year the pupils had been together almost all day and every day for two years and it was a relief for those in both classes, but especially the pupils in 3Y, to be free of the constant company of so many of their classmates.

Indeed, it was only the thought that they would not all be together in third year that enabled some of 2Y to cope with their peers. Fred, a very serious, quiet boy with an ability to sum up situations, gave his reasons for the tensions which had built up between them in second year:

F. We knew each other too well and we knew how to get at each other and that's what we did. It wasn't good in many ways - we were together too long. It's better in third year because we've met new people and got new friends.

Further comments on this theme can be found in Appendix 35.

One disadvantage of third year mentioned by a small number of pupils was the increase in the amount of homework the pupils were expected to do. Conversely, some pupils said that the increase was balanced out by the fact that they studied fewer subjects in third year.

Many of those in the top groups said that they were now able to get on with their work because those who were less interested were in other classes. Mohammed, who seemed very much at ease during the Individual Conversation, explained
that he was accustomed to being with, and talking to, adults. He said that he hoped to do well at school and reported that it was now a little easier to concentrate in many of his classes. He gave his comparisons between second with third years:

M. Last year in Science we didn't get much done because some people were always throwing water and burning pens in the flame of the Bunsen burner. I used to have to do experiments on my own because I was with some people who just didn't want to know. That was really difficult because you couldn't really do a lot of them on your own. It's better this year because they're not in our class and we can do our work. We get on better with the teacher too because he's not always having to shout at us.

For some, being in different classes from their friends, was a wrench to begin with but, for most, the experience of making new friends far outweighed any initial disappointment. For the majority of pupils their world had opened up since being in third year. Apart from making new friends in school, many were being given greater freedom at home and were being allowed to stay out later in the evenings and to take part in social activities forbidden in second year.

Some belonged to clubs and societies and others had part-time jobs. Involvement in such activities helped pupils to widen their circle of friends and associates and most involved in such ventures made mention of the fact that their sense of responsibility had developed as a result. All these pupils described themselves as being necessary to the smooth running of their club, society or part-time job.
Unlike school, they considered that they had an essential role to fill and they felt important and needed, as judged by the way in which they described their position in their organisation. Angus, who was described by the AHT as a bit of a loner and extremely poor on paper said that he had worked for a little time in a newsagent. He went on to describe in detail and with considerable enthusiasm how he was now working in a fish shop where he had more to do and where more was expected of him, although he was not yet allowed to serve customers:

A. The owner has spent years building up his customers and one slip of my tongue could lose him all that, so I have to work at the back of the shop and watch how he does it. When I've learned I'll get to come to the front and serve. It's quite hard sometimes but he says I'm good and I'm learning.

It was quite apparent from the way in which Angus spoke about the few hours he worked with the fishmonger that the work was considerably more relevant to him than anything that went on in school.

Pupils who were engaged in outside activities spoke about how they were better able to cope with stress in school as a result of their commitments. Some said that they felt more confident because of having achieved success in their chosen activity as Victoria, Eric, Fred and Charlotte clearly demonstrated. Their stories, along with the comments of other pupils, are contained in Appendix 36.

The many different ways in which the pupils had widened their horizons gave them alternative views of life and of
themselves and affected their ways of coping. For some, the academic side of school became increasingly less important and the main focus of school was now as a forum for meeting their friends. Others described themselves as being academically ambitious but, as a result of their outside activities, they were able to regard school as just another aspect of their lives and to assign a role of lesser importance to many of the anxieties which had troubled them in second year. Many described feeling "more grown up" and being "more able to stand up for themselves". Those with a part-time job spoke of working, mixing and talking with adults. They enjoyed this experience and said that they learned from the adults by watching what they did. The relationships they enjoyed with many of these adults appeared to be much more positive and nourishing than those with staff and for many it was a novel experience to be treated as if they were responsible and grown up instead of silly children. Unlike school pupils, they had a necessary and clearly defined role to play and experienced enhanced self-esteem when they successfully fulfilled this role. And, as demonstrated above, affirmation and high self-esteem had a roll-on effect enabling people to cope more effectively with future stressors.

Summary of Pupils' Responses

The stressors of third year, in general, were more varied for those pupils who said that they had increased their out of school activities than for those who said they had not.
For those in the first category it could be quite difficult to balance school and social life and sometimes school lost much of its former interest. Some pupils, for whom school had never held much appeal, said that they were glad to have found something to interest them whether this was a wider social circle and new friends, a club or society or a part-time job. Others said that they very much wanted to do well at school but that it could be difficult to balance the conflicting interests of friends, employers, parents and teachers. Two pupils, who had belonged to clubs in second year, said that they had stopped attending these since being in third year because of the pressure of work. Some pupils (mainly girls) whose parents were less willing than others to allow greater social freedom had lost friends because they were not permitted to stay out very late or very often or to visit certain places. This was more stressful for the one whose freedom was curbed because, apart from losing her friends and sometimes being slagged at school and called a "baby", there was usually the added stress of arguments between the girl and her parents.

A high number of pupils spoke about the good and bad points of being streamed, according to ability, in third year. There were very few complaints from those in top streams but pupils in lower ability classes were less happy both with their peers behaviour and with the attitudes of some teachers. The comments of pupils who compared the differences between Credit, General and Foundation classes are detailed in Appendix 37.
Many pupils, especially those with wider social horizons, were encountering new stressors in their out-of-school activities and the ways in which they dealt with these affected how they coped in school. Clare explained how belonging to a drama club for the last four months had changed her way of coping and helped her to take her school responsibilities more seriously:

C. I just joined the club for a laugh because my friend asked me. I never took anything seriously but I think that being in the club has helped me. They said that if we couldn't be relied on to turn up for rehearsals we were no use to them, so I go every week. I wouldn't let them down - not now. I'm better in school this year - I didn't care last year. I used to say anything but I'm more sensible now.

Clare went on to say that she had learned from the members of the drama club that it was possible to "have a laugh" (which was most important to Clare) and still be responsible. In second year, she said, she would have seen the two as incompatible. In addition, she considered that she now had more confidence in herself because she met with more approval both in and out of school. She added that in second year she often thought that she was being picked on and could not see why teachers in particular, were "always getting at" her and telling her to stop talking. Now that she was in third year, she said, she could appreciate that she had been a "pain" and a "show off" much of the time but that these qualities in her were now being directed more positively since joining the drama club. Jason, too, spoke about how he was coping differently and his comments along with those of Hannah and others can be found in Appendix 38.
Not all pupils had increased their out-of-school activities or made new friends but the behaviour of their peers who had, almost inevitably had the effect of altering the behaviour of the others. However, not all pupils were susceptible to the codes of behaviour set by their peers. One such case was Jonathan, one of the 'little boys' described above. Jonathan, I was told by several pupils, still played games more suitable for a younger boy and had been slagged without mercy in first year but was now generally ignored. Jonathan's story can be found in Appendix 39.

Another 'odd boy out' I often encountered as I walked about the school was David, the pupil with cystic fibrosis who is described in section 5.2.3. He had not been in either 2X or 2Y so I had not spoken to him during the Group Conversations. However, he frequently asked how my work was progressing and if there would be an opportunity for him to speak to me about how he perceived and coped with stress in school. Eventually, after being asked this same question almost every day, I arranged with the AHT to see David and his story is also described in Appendix 39.

The reasons for changes in coping strategies were mostly concerned with having experienced, in the Kellyan sense, a number of new people and new situations. As a result of these encounters the pupils learned how to deal with new situations (not necessarily stressful) and were able to
apply their new skills to a variety of situations. Some spoke of having a wider range of coping strategies from which to choose and said that this gave them confidence. Others said that having broadened their experiences of life they realised that they had frequently worried about things in school that really were not worth bothering about. However, it was only as a result of having experienced new events, often quite unconnected with school, that they could take this view. Both Alice and Margaret made this point and their comments can be found in Appendix 40.

As so many pupils mentioned that they had learned to deal with situations by watching other people cope, I was prompted to ask if they thought that coping strategies in general, could be learned in this way. However, the vast majority of pupils did not consider that this was possible. Although they clearly did learn from others how to deal with situations and although pupils said that they had picked up both good and bad coping strategies from their friends and colleagues little of this learning seemed to be at a conscious level. Even when the pupils and I discussed and examined specific situations which they described as having learned, it appeared that usually the pupils just found that they were doing the same as someone else without any forethought or knowledge. Sylvia was one of only a handful of pupils who said that she had tried to copy a classmate's coping strategy. Her explanation of what she had done and her evaluation of its failure are described in Appendix 41.
After asking the above question I enquired why some people seemed to be able to cope so much better than others. Most pupils replied that they did not really know but that it probably depended on the sort of home the person came from. Kenneth was a cheery boy who always greeted me with a smile if I met him around school. He was in no doubt that the ways in which his parents coped had rubbed off on him and Victoria shared his opinion. Their views, along with those of others, are contained in Appendix 42.

A small number of pupils thought that people learned to cope better if "they don't lead sheltered lives" or if they reflected on what had gone on during the day. Pupils' views on this aspect of coping are also contained in Appendix 42.

Fred was the only pupil of whom I asked this question who mentioned that a personal quality in the individual might enable someone to cope better than another. He suggested that some people have an "inner strength" which helped them to "ride the waves of life" which "knock other people down". In addition, he said that although he had no control over others he had control over himself and that this often gave him confidence when he felt under pressure. This was in contrast with the vast majority of pupils who were of the opinion that the ability or inability to cope well depended solely on the sorts of relationships they had with other people.

5.6.8 Summary of Phase Three
The Individual Conversations were carried out each morning during the first three weeks of the Spring term of the pupils' third year. Each conversation lasted for 30 minutes which allowed sufficient time to cover all the research questions. However, I found that the schedule of seven conversations in the course of a morning was too onerous. My concentration lapsed as the morning progressed and I became increasingly less able to ask appropriate follow-up questions.

My fear that the gap of two terms between the Group and Individual Conversations would have had a deleterious effect on the rapport and trust which had developed between the pupils and myself during phases one and two, was unfounded. In the Individual Conversations the pupils were much more willing to admit personal experiences of stress and coping than they were during the Group Conversations. Almost all the pupils preferred seeing me on their own because they could say what they liked without the fear of their peers' reactions.

During this phase of the research I was invited to attend the weekly meeting of the Special Needs department in order to discuss ways in which pupils in this category could be helped to cope more effectively in school. Although the staff mentioned specific pupils and the problems they faced, no one asked me any questions about individual pupils. However, because of the risk of breaking confidentiality, I
did find conversation rather awkward. I tended, therefore, to talk in a more generalised way than I would have liked but I did not know how else to respond.

At the invitation of the Head of Department, I also attended lessons in the Art department for one day during this phase of the study. I was additionally asked to spend a day in the Drama and Home Economics departments but lack of time prevented me from accepting these invitations.

5.7 PHASE FOUR: ATTENDING LESSONS WITH SELECTED PUPILS

As a result of the Individual Conversations I selected five pupils who agreed to help with Phase Four of the Study which took place as soon as Phase Three was completed. When the AHT informed me that staff had agreed to my being present in their lessons I chose the pupils with whom I was to attend lessons. The criteria for selection were that the pupils agreed to my being present with them in class and that they were able to articulate their perceptions of stress and coping. To a certain extent, therefore, the pupils were self-selecting. The aim for this phase of the study was to attend lessons for one day with each of the pupils over the course of one week so that I could discuss with them how they coped with stressful situations as soon as possible after they took place.

Details of the selection of pupils can be found in Appendix 43.
5.7.1 Categorisation of Pupils

The three categories into which I had placed the pupils are detailed in section 4.7.3. Although there were several pupils who could be placed in the first category (experiencing stress and not coping well) they, generally speaking, did not feel confident enough to cope with my attention as well as their teachers' and, more particularly, their peers' reactions. Furthermore, with some pupils in this category, the Individual Conversation had gone round in circles to the extent that I did not consider it would be of much benefit to either of us to be together for the day. It was rather difficult, therefore, to find a suitable pupil in this category to accompany for the day.

I eventually chose Simon who lived with his Grandmother. He was a small, rather grubby boy who expressed an ambition to join the army. Before coming to the present school in first year he had attended a boarding school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. That school had only 30 pupils and Simon said he had experienced many problems adjusting to and coping with over 1300 pupils in this school and had often been in trouble. Simon was well known to the school Educational Psychologist who told me that he had actually done very well in the present school, considering his home and previous educational backgrounds. The school Counsellor explained that Simon found it difficult to relate to many pupils and teachers but that he was improving and had learned to go to the Counsellor rather
than fighting with people. Both Simon and the Counsellor told me that Simon had recently spent a week working in the Counsellor's office because of trouble between some classmates and himself. This was considered to be progress because Simon had taken himself to the Counsellor before events got out of hand. Simon, who was mainly in Foundation classes, expressed little interest in matters academic but said that he was enjoying Science a little more recently as the class had a student teacher who "didn't have a go" at him and let him work at his own pace. He enjoyed talking about himself and explained that he had learned to speak about his problems whilst in the boarding school. He thought that he was coping better in third year than he had been in first or second years and was pleased with this improvement. He was one of several pupils who said that a person's ability to cope well improved with age but was at a total loss to explain his reasoning. He also reported, with equal conviction and the same lack of reasoning, that he looked forward to being older because people would respect him. He seemed quite delighted when I asked if I could attend classes with him and gave one of his rare, slow smiles.

The second category (experiencing stress but coping well) was more easily filled. Indeed, the vast majority of pupils came into this category. I selected Alan, who had been on report and whose Case Study appears in Appendix 34. Alan explained that he spent much of his time "thinking things out" and said that he had a good relationship with his older
sister who had attended the present school and who helped
him with his problems because she had experienced many of
them herself. Alan sounded older than many of his peers and
was one of several very articulate boys. He always took his
time to consider anything I asked and was quite prepared to
suggest that I had misunderstood what he had said and to
explain himself again. He was at pains much of the time to
ensure that I knew exactly what he meant. Alan, who was
mainly in General classes, said that he wanted to do well at
school but that he worried about things and frequently
lacked confidence in his ability. He added that the anguish
he had suffered from being put on report had helped him to
grow up. Alan readily agreed that I should attend lessons
with him.

In the same category as Alan I also chose to accompany
Sylvia who was a hard working, academically able girl whose
comments are contained in Appendices 20 and 41. She was one
of several pupils who were extremely thoughtful and able to
explain themselves. She was in Credit classes for all her
subjects. Sylvia said that she very much enjoyed thinking
about the sorts of questions I had asked and liked finding
out things about herself through discussion. She was a
gentle, shy girl but I suspected that there was a quiet
confidence there. She said that she looked forward to the
experience sufficiently, to be able to cope with any
difficulties my presence might incur.

The third category (not experiencing stress) was also hard
to fill. Undoubtedly, the least stressed of the pupils I met seemed to be Jonathan (whose Case Study appears in Appendix 39) but as he appeared to be unable to discuss stress in either a personal or an abstract way I ruled him out. The only other pupils who could vaguely be categorised as not experiencing stress was the handful of boys who saw themselves as the 'men' of the third year. One of these, Euan, seemed to be the most genuinely relaxed (as opposed to working hard to appear that way) and least stressed. Furthermore, he was more willing than some of his friends to discuss his ways of coping with the problems he encountered. He explained that his father had a garage which sold second hand cars, that he often worked there and that he had learned from his father how to deal with prospective customers. It was most important, he emphasised, that no pressure was put on them and Euan thought that teachers could learn something from such an approach and was of the opinion that they would get more out of pupils if they let them work at their own pace. Euan had a certain charm and, by the way in which some of his friends spoke about him, I considered that he enjoyed good social status with his peers. I decided, therefore, that Euan was better able than some of the other 'relaxed' boys to cope with me for a day without tarnishing his image. Furthermore, unlike some of the other third year 'men' he always initiated any transaction between us around school. He agreed, in his casual way, to my request to attend classes with him, adding that it was "no problem".
Details of attending lessons can be found in Appendix 44.

5.7.2 Pupils' Reactions to my Presence in Class

It was interesting to observe the reactions of the pupils. Before talking with any of them in class I tried to gauge their attitude to my being there. If, as I approached, they suddenly buried themselves in work I took this as a sign that they preferred not to speak to me and I respected their wish. Others stopped working, looked up at me, smiled and either spoke or, more usually, waited for me to speak to them. Some, who had been extremely talkative in the Individual Conversation, chose to disregard me in class. Several spoke to me in some classes but not in others, depending, perhaps, on who else was present. Sometimes pupils whom I had not previously met were more willing to talk to me than those I already knew. Yet others were calling me over to speak to me, perhaps to demonstrate to the class that they knew me.

As I went round the class talking with individuals, many pupils expressed disapproval at my choice of person to follow for the day and suggested that I would have learned more had I chosen them. In a way I considered that this phase of the research was asking a great deal of the pupils and had not considered that anyone would actually have wanted to be chosen. Of course, those pupils who indicated that they had been overlooked may only have said what they did because they knew they were now on safe ground.
5.7.3 Teachers' Reactions to my Presence in Class

Interesting as the pupils' reactions were, it was the reactions of the teachers which surprised me most of all. I had been in the school for approximately two and a half terms; I had spoken with many of the staff who knew what my research was about and that I was working with the pupils in classes 3X and 3Y. In addition, those staff whose lessons I attended were informed of the purpose of this phase of the research and had agreed to my being present.

I should make it clear that the majority of teachers were unaware that I was a teacher. It was not that I deliberately hid this fact, rather that I saw no reason to offer the information. One or two members of staff did ask what I did "in real life" and to those I said that I had been teaching.

Generally speaking, the staff were somewhat wary of my presence, although they all made me welcome. I soon learned that most teachers wanted to talk to me and that it was necessary to make myself available some time during the lesson. On several occasions where this was not possible, because the teacher spoke from the moment the class arrived until we all left, I made a point of speaking to the teacher later in the staffroom.

Almost all the teachers, before I could say anything to them, apologised for their lessons and frequently described
them as "boring". I was often told about the interesting lesson they had given the previous week and the one planned for the following week; it was a pity I had come that particular day when it was so dull. I was then told why it lacked interest and the aims and objectives for the lesson were explained to me. I was frequently asked if I thought the pupils answered well enough, if I thought they understood the points being taught. Perhaps the lesson should be adapted next time. What did I think? Quite often I was shown work done by a variety of classes as well as being taken through the teachers' syllabus and record book. The ways in which they had taught various parts of their scheme of work were explained, as were their plans not only for the rest of the syllabus but also for the following academic year. Frequently the subject being described was one about which I knew little and I had nothing helpful to say. I soon learned, however, that I was neither expected nor required to comment. So many of these teachers simply wanted someone to talk to. Some spoke, almost without drawing breath, jumping from one topic to another, rushing off to get something to show me, sometimes asking my opinion but carrying on talking before I could open my mouth. One or two, once started, ignored the class totally, whilst they spoke to me. To begin with I did try to stem the flow of the teachers' talk, to attempt to re-explain the purpose of my presence in their class but it soon became clear that they did not want to hear about me and my research. Essentially, the teachers wanted to talk and some followed me around the class in order to carry on their conversation.
and I did not have the heart to stop them. Some even sought me out after the lesson was over to explain some finer point they had overlooked at the time. I spent much of the week, therefore, being an audience to a variety of teachers. These staff came across to me as very professional, hard working people who were keen to improve as teachers. They spoke with enthusiasm about their subject, they wanted the pupils to do well and they were their own most severe critics. It was not, of course, my place to judge them as teachers and I would not have presumed to do so but I did find it extremely sad and most disconcerting that so many teachers saw themselves and their work in such a negative light and were so very keen to unburden themselves and seek affirmation from me.

5.7.4 Some Teachers' Thoughts on Pupils' Perceptions of Stress

Although I did not specifically ask staff what they thought pupils found stressful in school, several did put forward their opinions. It was interesting that almost all their suggestions concerned school work, which might confirm some pupils' opinions that "teachers think we just come here to work". One or two suggested, almost with pride I thought, that the pupils probably complained about their working them too hard or their being strong disciplinarians. Other teachers thought that examinations were stressful because the pupils then realised how little work they had done. When I suggested that bullying might be a problem most teachers refuted it, adding that bullying was not a problem
in their school. No one actually asked if I had found it to be a stressor. I then asked if arguments between friends might be stressful but most did not place any importance on this, saying that children argued all the time and they just had to learn to deal with it. When I asked about poor relationships with staff I was usually told that any problems in this area were brought about by the pupils themselves and that if they behaved well there would be no problems. I asked about problems at home. Some said that there was little the school could do about that and one teacher replied, rather angrily, "Well, we all have to cope with that, don't we?". To be fair to these teachers, whose responses might seem very simplistic, I did not probe what they said in any way as this was not part of the research but simply accepted their utterances at face value.

5.7.5 Findings from Attending Lessons

Pupils in Foundation classes were more inclined than those in Credit classes to say that they liked to work on their own and at their own pace. In the few lessons where the class worked on projects several pupils seemed to do very little and a great deal of time was spent talking to the people sitting nearby. When I asked these pupils their opinions of such lessons they replied that they liked them better than classes where the teacher was always nagging them to work harder. Many of them thought that they were working quite well and none suggested that time was being wasted. The more academically ambitious pupils said that
they enjoyed working on their own but reported that they frequently did not work very hard and tended to take longer than was necessary to do the work. Many of these pupils said that it was important to work as a class because they were forced to apply themselves in order to keep up. Conversely, many of the less interested pupils reported that they tended to fall behind when the class worked as a whole, rather than working harder to keep up. Those pupils, who said that they liked working on their own, explained that it allowed them to "work things out" for themselves and to "understand things properly". The subjects spoken about with most enthusiasm were the practical ones in which the pupils were making something designed by themselves. This enthusiasm was rather lacking in teacher-directed subjects.

Details of the findings from accompanying selected pupils including days with Simon, Alan, Sylvia and Euan can be found in Appendix 45.

5.7.6 Reflections on Phase Four

The findings from this phase of the study were rather disappointing. I realised that this was a well run school but was not prepared for the high standards of order and discipline that I encountered in the classrooms. It was most interesting to see the pupils in situ, to be part of the settings which they had described to me in the Group and Individual Conversations and to observe their transactions with staff and their peers. However, as there did not appear to be any stressful situations I was unable to
discuss how the pupils coped with them as they took place and, therefore, the aim for this phase of the study was not fulfilled. Perhaps I picked the wrong pupils or perhaps I picked the wrong days on which to accompany them.

My presence in class had a considerable effect on the ways in which several teachers behaved, as judged by the fact that so many were very keen to discuss their performance with me. Teachers were undoubtedly much more aware of me than the pupils were and I considered that some were putting on a show for me. However, since Simon thought that, because I was there, he had been better treated by some pupils as well as by a teacher, my presence might have had more of an effect on the pupils than I realised.

At the end of each day the selected pupil and I discussed what had taken place but, apart from Simon, none of the others suggested that anything stressful had taken place (and Simon did not want to talk about it) or that my being there made any difference to them. In fact, they seemed almost too eager to make this point. Perhaps this was a way of coping with something which was essentially quite stressful.

I had learned from the pupils in the Individual Conversations that they frequently were better able to understand events after they had taken place than when they were in the midst of them. Therefore, in the next school, I asked the selected pupils to see me the following morning in
order to discuss the happenings of the previous day. The pupils were thus allowed some time to mull over what had taken place and to see the events a little more clearly because they could stand back from them. Furthermore, as I also was part of the scene, I had first hand knowledge of what they were telling me.
CHAPTER SIX

THE MAIN STUDY: SCHOOL B
6.1 BACKGROUND AND PLANNING

6.1.1 Initial Contact and Gaining Entry

As soon as the plans for the Pilot Study were confirmed I wrote to the Headteacher of School B outlining my research and enquiring about the possibility of conducting the Main Study in that school. In response I received a letter from the teacher in charge of Guidance (PTG) for second year pupils. In her letter she explained that, as she had little free time, there might be difficulties in organising my programme. However, she suggested that we meet and asked me to telephone her. This I did and we agreed on a date and time to discuss my research plans.

Details of the composition of the school, my meeting with the PTG and my plans for Phase One are described in Appendix 46.

6.2 PHASE ONE: ORIENTATION PERIOD AND OBSERVATION SESSIONS

Involved as I was in a naturalistic study, I was aware of the need to view the school as a whole if I hoped to understand the words and actions of the second year pupils with whom I was to work. Campbell (1988, p.61) urged that the researcher:

must portray the subject as a whole, in the temporal, geographical, sociocultural context.

Guba (1978, p.16) explained the reason for doing this when
he stated:

The naturalistic inquirer, far from screening out context, makes every effort to understand it so that he can assess its meaning for and impact on the elements.

Furthermore, according to Shimahara (1988) the study of human behaviour and events in a cultural context requires the researcher to observe both the events relevant to the framework of the immediate research setting and the relationships of these events to a broader sociocultural environment. Spindler (1963, p.7) added to this when he posited:

Sociocultural knowledge held by social participants makes social behavior and communication sensible to oneself and to others.

It is clear that an important part of the naturalistic researcher's work is to understand what sociocultural knowledge respondents bring to and generate in the social setting under study. This orientation and observation phase of the study, therefore, was essential in order to understand the setting and those in it.

Details of entering the field, the lessons I attended, the problems I encountered and the steps I took to overcome difficulties are contained in Appendix 47.

6.2.1 First Meeting with the Headteacher

The Headteacher had already been pointed out to me so when I met her in the corridor I introduced myself. She took me
into her office where we spoke about my research and she
gave me some of her views on education, in general and on
her school in particular. Scottish education, she said, was
still rather traditional and some staff thought that her
methods were too informal. She went on to say that when
teachers try to do all the disciplining, pupils do not learn
to be responsible for their own behaviour. It was so very
important, she continued, to turn out young people with a
sense of their own worth; young people who can adapt to our
changing society. It was also important, in her opinion,
that school should be a happy place for pupils and that they
should find their education relevant. She hoped that when
they left school they would appreciate that their education
had just begun and, because it was a Community school, they
would realise they could add to their skills and knowledge
for as long as they chose.

The pupils did not achieve academically, she said, but was
not sure if this was attributable to the atmosphere in the
school or to the catchment area. She explained that since
the Parents' Charter (which allowed parents to send their
children to a school of their own choice) the school had
suffered from a falling roll. Although a high proportion of
the houses around the school were owner-occupied, the
children from these, she said, did not attend her school.

That afternoon, the Headteacher and the PTG for first year
were going skating with a group of second year pupils. It
was most important, she explained, that staff and pupils
together, take part in social activities.

6.2.2 Summary of and Reflections on Phase One

The Observation and Orientation Phase of the study lasted for a total of eight weeks and I spent one morning a week in the school. During that time I received considerably less help from the PTG than I had from my main contact teachers in the other two schools. I also met fewer pupils and had yet to meet those with whom I was to conduct the Group and Individual Conversations. This last problem resulted from the fact that their Social Education lesson took place on a Friday which coincided with the time of the Pilot Study.

To a great extent I was left to my own devices but, because of the openness and informality of the school, I could wander about the building without appearing out of place. I was able, therefore, to take the initiative and try to sort out any problems without having to rely on the teacher with whom I was liaising.

For some time I found that having the relative freedom of the school was quite difficult to cope with. Having taught for a number of years in a Convent school where the doors had to be kept locked (so many needy people came to the door) and later in a school where the equipment often disappeared and pupils were sometimes mugged in the corridors, I was accustomed to staff verifying the credentials of strangers. For approximately the first
month, therefore, I felt quite uneasy walking about the corridors, mainly because I had no clearly defined role in the school.

As this school was so very much smaller than the other two, I was able to find my way around more easily and to meet and talk with a greater proportion of the staff (teaching and ancillary) than I would have been able to do in a larger organisation. Additionally, I began to recognise the faces of pupils I met around the school and to be recognised by them.

Despite the unfortunate fact that I was not working with the pupils with whom I intended to conduct the Group and Individual Conversations, I was able to become 'immersed in the setting' (Corsaro, 1985) and to become, to an extent, part of that setting. Throughout this phase of the study I looked at the whole school organisation. The reason for taking this approach was clearly explained by Diesing (1972, p.204):

A holistic theory is an appropriate guide to ...observation because it continually reminds the observer that his particular, immediate observation must be understood and interpreted by reference to a larger background, and it provides a general account of the background that can illuminate the particular observed fact.

As a result of prolonged interaction with pupils, staff and members of the public my questioning became more focused as the term progressed. On writing about the interaction between the researcher and respondent Lincoln and Guba
(1985, p.100) claimed that:

Each influences the other, and the direction that the data gathering will take in the next moment is acutely dependent upon what data have already been collected and in what manner. There is in the investigator-respondent dyad a transitivity, a continuous unfolding, a series of iterations. Each shapes the other and is shaped by the other.

By the end of term I considered that I was familiar with the culture of the school and that I had met as many of the aims for this phase of the study as was possible.

6.3 PHASE ONE CONTINUED: OBSERVATION SESSIONS WITH THREE SECOND YEAR CLASSES

6.3.1 Sample Population

Five second year tutor groups were timetabled for Social Education on a Friday morning. Each lesson lasted for one hour and 10 minutes (that is, two 35 minute periods). Two tutor groups were taught by the Principal Teacher of Guidance (PTG) with responsibility for second year pupils, two were taught by the PTG with responsibility for first year pupils and one was taught by the Headteacher. Each tutor group contained, approximately, 16 pupils and I selected to work with three classes, each taught by a different member of staff. I chose to work with different teachers in order to obtain as broad a perspective as possible on the school. The selection of the three classes was determined by the timetable. Each of the Guidance staff was scheduled to teach a group at the beginning of the morning and all three teachers had a group after morning
break. I chose to work with the tutor group taught by the PTG responsible for second year pupils during the first 70 minutes of the morning so that I could discuss with her anything that needed to be arranged. After break, I chose to work with the tutor group taught by the PTG responsible for first year pupils during the first 35 minutes and with the tutor group taught by the Headteacher during the second 35 minutes.

Both the PTG for first year and the Headteacher were consulted, firstly by the PTG for second year and then by myself, and they agreed to the above arrangements.

6.3.2 First Contact of the Spring Term

At the end of the Christmas term it had been arranged that I would go to the school on the first Friday of the Spring term in order to meet the pupils with whom I was to conduct the Group and Individual Conversations. As soon as the new term began I rang the PTG to confirm our arrangements and was told that it was not very suitable for me to come to the school on the Friday of that week as the Careers Officer, who was feeling very nervous, was to be there. I was told that all second year pupils were to have a talk about option choices for third year, that there would be a great upheaval and that all the groups would be mixed up. I explained that my main aim for that Friday was to meet the pupils and that I did not mind the upheaval or the fact that the groups would be mixed up. Rather reluctantly, I thought, the PTG
agreed to my coming to the school.

Details of my first meeting with the Careers Officer can be found in Appendix 48.

6.3.3 **First Meeting with Class 2E**

The class was seated in what was called the Year Room. It was in an extremely poor state of repair and rather dirty. (This room was out of use much of the following year as it was one of the first to be renovated). Along one wall there was an old stainless steel sink with some half-washed cups left to dry on the draining board and notices were pinned up around the room. In a small recess there were some very old easy chairs which I soon learned had to be examined carefully before lowering oneself, tentatively, into them. Several had no springs, resulting in one sinking almost to the floor, others had springs poking through the upholstery. The pupils did not seem to mind and jostled with each other to secure one of these grubby, uncomfortable chairs in preference to an upright one.

The class consisted of 17 pupils; 12 girls and five boys. In common with the other two schools in the study, the present school had a uniform but I was not aware of anyone wearing it. Two of the girls wore Indian dress. The PTG told the class to sit at the tables which were in the main part of the room. The PTG introduced the Careers Officer and tried to introduce me but had forgotten my surname. I introduced myself to the class who seemed a little more
interested than 2B had been the previous term. I gave a brief outline of my research and the important contribution that I hoped second year pupils would play. As I did not want to take too much time from the Careers Officer, I explained that I would return the following week when we would discuss my project further.

For the rest of the lesson I sat at the side of the class and observed their interactions. The pupils seemed quite subdued and, although they all co-operated with the Careers Officer by dutifully studying the worksheets she handed out, many seemed slow, reluctant even, to answer any questions she put to them. One very small boy was the only one who spoke freely. He appeared quite happy to do this and frequently answered at length. One other boy did occasionally venture to speak but the remaining three, by the way they avoided eye contact, appeared not to want to be asked and remained silent throughout. Several girls offered their opinions but did not seem to enjoy it a great deal and there was much squirming in chairs. Two other girls answered in an off-hand manner (to cover embarrassment, I decided) when specifically asked and three did not speak at all. I formed the impression that these pupils, who were beginning their fifth term together, were not very comfortable with each other. I looked forward to meeting them the following week in order to have my impressions confirmed or disconfirmed.

6.3.4 First Meeting with Class 2H
This class consisted of 15 pupils; seven girls and eight boys. They were taught by the PTG responsible for first year and were already seated in a circle when the Careers Officer and I entered. The room was bright and there were examples of the pupils' work on the walls. The teacher, who made a space in the circle for the Careers Officer and myself, introduced us to the class and asked if I wanted to say any more about myself. I explained why I was in school, adding that we would discuss my project in more detail the following week.

This group was considerably more talkative than 2E had been and a lively discussion followed, during which some very interesting and thoughtful questions were raised. The pupils with the most to say were a girl and a boy, who, by the questions they asked, seemed to be academically ambitious. Several others were quite prepared to ask questions and give answers and there were two girls and two boys who did not speak at all. The lesson seemed to pass very quickly and the Careers Officer said afterwards that she was favourably impressed with the group.

6.3.5 First Meeting with Class 2M

This class, which was taught by the Headteacher, was (unlike 2E and 2H) seated formally, that is, behind desks. The room was normally used for the teaching of French. It was very neat and tidy and the classroom and the corridor walls were covered with French posters and pupils' work. The
Headteacher introduced the Careers Officer and myself to the class before inviting me to tell the class a little about myself. This I did, again explaining that we would discuss my research further the following week.

The group consisted of 15 pupils: seven girls and eight boys. They were quite a mixed group, physically. Some girls and boys were considerably bigger than the others and there were two boys who could have been mistaken for Primary pupils. One of these small boys was especially keen to answer any question the Careers Officer asked. His hand was constantly raised, even before she had finished speaking but whenever she asked him, the answer, apparently, had just slipped his mind and she had to ask someone else.

Whenever the pupils were unable to think of an answer, or had not answered very fully, the Headteacher, by probing and questioning further, made the class think harder until they produced a satisfactory answer. In this way she showed the pupils how they had known the answer all along and by the end of the lesson I think that they had enjoyed the session and seemed rather proud of themselves when the Careers Officer congratulated them on their hard work.

Details of my first Social Education lessons with classes 2E, 2H and 2M and preparation for the Group Conversations can be found in Appendix 49.

6.3.6 Reflections on the Observation Sessions with Three
Second Year Classes

A total of five weeks was spent observing classes 2E, 2H and 2M. I was satisfied with the degree of sociality and commonality I had managed to establish with the three groups during that time. I formed the impression that the pupils were, generally speaking, quite happy talking with adults. Perhaps because of the nature of the school (that is, its philosophy, bound up with the fact that it was a Community School), the line between pupils and teachers seemed to be more blurred than in the other schools in the study. Resulting from this, the majority of pupils were at ease with me within the space of a very short time.

When I mentioned the above observation to the Headteacher she expressed concern about the increasing gap that she saw developing between teenagers and adults. It was one of her aims, she added, to produce happy young people who could relate to adults in a friendly, responsible manner. To this end she emphasised the importance of joint social ventures between pupils and staff. I experienced the Headteacher as a very positive, energetic person who liked the pupils and was interested in them and who enjoyed working with them. Her lessons had an interest and an excitement about them which were transmitted to the pupils (and, indeed, to myself) as judged by their enthusiastic response. She spoke to pupils and adults in the same way (that is, with respect and as if they were her equals) and the pupils responded accordingly. This was in contrast with the grouse of a group of boys in the Pilot Study. They complained bitterly
that certain teachers seemed to expect the worst from them and approached them with less than respect. Such treatment, understandably, caused resentment and, as a way of punishing these teachers, the boys duly behaved badly, thus fulfilling the teachers' expectations. On the other hand, the girls in the class, so the boys complained, were expected to behave well and did so, thus guaranteeing the better treatment, which the boys were denied but so badly wanted.

During the five weeks that I spent on this phase of the study I was frequently in the Guidance room where I was able to observe the Guidance system in action and to get to know the Guidance staff. The PTG for first year (whose lessons I attended with class 2H) was always most solicitous and anxious to do anything she could to help me. In common with so many of the teachers in school A whose classes I attended, she liked to discuss her lessons with me afterwards and it was humbling to observe the way in which any comments I made appeared to be taken seriously.

The PTG for second year always seemed to be very busy and was rarely in the Guidance Room. During the lessons with class 2E she often had to leave the group to deal with other matters and I was left with the pupils. They were always rather subdued and the worst they ever did was fail to do the work she left them. I spent much of my time talking with the small groups into which the class so clearly divided itself. From listening to their stories I learned that the PTG was liked and respected by the pupils. From
talking with her I formed the impression that she took the welfare of the pupils very seriously. She certainly knew them very well. Whenever I mentioned any pupils to her she could tell me something about their background and was quite prepared to do so. As time went on she became more communicative and often apologised for being less available to me than she would have liked but explained that she had a great deal to do. She appeared to be willing to organise anything for me (although she still had to be reminded) so long as it did not involve my watching her teach.

This phase of the study was duly completed and the scene was set for Phase Two, the Group Conversations.

6.4 PHASE TWO: GROUP CONVERSATIONS

6.4.1 Format for the Group Conversations

The Group Conversations were organised in the same way as those in School A (see section 5.3.4) and the same procedures were followed.

6.5 FINDINGS FORM THE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

Details of the allocation of time and pupil groupings are contained in Appendix 50.

6.5.1 Group Interaction

The pupils of class 2E were markedly more at ease at the
beginning of the Group Conversations than those in classes 2H and 2M. Three separate groups of girls from 2E, as soon as they arrived for the Group Conversation, said that they were looking forward to it and one pair said that they had offered to be the first group to see me as they had been thinking about my research and felt there were some things they should say before I saw any other groups. I wondered if this, almost instant, rapport could be attributed to the fact that I had spent 70 minutes for five weeks with class 2E as opposed to 35 minutes with each of the other two classes. After further consideration, however, I decided that the amount of time spent with the groups was probably less relevant than the quality of our interaction during that time. At no time during the Observation Sessions with the three groups was I left alone with classes 2H and 2M. Class 2E and I, on the other hand, spent a considerable amount of time together without a teacher. Some of the time we were half-heartedly filling in worksheets, at other times we were simply talking with and listening to each other. At the time, I was less than satisfied with this arrangement because it was not part of my plans. Furthermore, as the only adult in the room I feared that I would be looked to to fulfil the teacher's role. I had already decided that I would not be the decision-making, disciplining adult but, in the event, the class was well behaved and undemanding and my fears were not realised. I tolerated the arrangement of being on my own with the class because I considered that there was little else I could do if I wanted to have contact with 2E prior to the Group Conversations. However, what I
failed to realise at the time was that, over the five weeks, the pupils and I were developing our own sociality; we were establishing common ground on which we were to build during the Group and Individual Conversations. By the time these pupils took part in the Group Conversations there was no need to spend time trying to put them at ease and reassuring them that they could say whatever they wanted. This ground had already been covered during the Observation Sessions.

In accordance with the procedure followed in the other schools in the study during this phase of the research, I arranged the chairs in a semi-circle with my chair facing the group so that they could see me without having to turn their heads. The distance between my chair and those of the pupils was approximately three feet. I was interested to note that, as soon as they sat down, a number of girls in class 2E pulled their chairs even closer to mine. I refrained from moving away although the distance between some pupils and myself was occasionally shorter than I would have chosen. Once I became aware of the adjustment of chairs I observed that, although some girls from other classes also moved closer to me either at the beginning or during the conversation, no boys did this on arrival and several boys chose to increase the distance between themselves and me. From talking with the boys I learned that the ones who moved away from me could be classified as the 'men' according to the criteria used by a group of boys in School A. That is, they spoke at length of the importance of "being hard", of "being able to take dares"
and of "not bothering about things". These boys also took up more physical space than the other pupils. Conversely, some of the 'little boys' (again using the criteria used by boys in School A) sometimes pulled their chairs a little closer to mine as they warmed to their subject in the course of the conversation.

In the Pilot Study and in School A I was alerted to the fact that girls and boys spoke about stress and coping differently from each other, when in the group situation. I was interested, therefore, to learn whether the same or other differences were apparent between the girls' groups and boys' groups in this school.

6.5.2 Differences between Girls' Groups and Boys' Groups

In common with the girls in both the Pilot Study and School A, the girls in the present school were quite prepared not only to discuss stress and coping but also to admit that they experienced stress on a personal level. Generally speaking, they supported and encouraged each other and behaved very much like the girls in the other schools in the study. One group of two, however, was an exception. They reminded me of the group of four girls in class 2B (with whom I had worked the previous term and who are described in Appendix 47) who were uncommunicative and always looked cold. These two girls were very small and thin and sat, huddled, on the edge of their chairs taking up as little space as possible. They seemed very uncomfortable and looked at the floor most of the time. They did not appear
to relax throughout the entire time we were together and frequently replied that they did not know the answers. I tried re-phrasing questions and giving them a little longer to answer but I soon learned that if they did not respond straightaway they just sat as stiff and still as statues until I said something. When they did answer it was in near whispers and neither helped the other if she was having difficulties in expressing herself. Both were willing to admit that they experienced stress but neither seemed able to describe the situations very well and both appeared quite unable to suggest, never mind talk about, coping strategies. They were by far the least communicative of all the groups I spoke with in the three schools. The PTG described both girls as being extremely limited academically and added that the parents of one of the girls were illiterate and the mother of the other was even less bright than her daughter. She said that neither girl communicated very well with her peers or with teachers. This last fact was borne out by other Guidance staff who said that they usually met with silence when they spoke to the girls.

Of the eight boys' groups (excluding the boy I saw on his own), six had a member who did considerably more talking than the rest of his group and he appeared to lead the conversation. Three of these six leaders extolled 'hardness' and openly admitted picking on other pupils, although this was usually seen as a joke. Confronted with such a show of machismo it was hardly surprising that the other members of these three groups found it extremely
difficult to talk about experiencing stress, as such a revelation would surely have been interpreted by the leader as weakness. In each of these groups the reticent boys tended to agree with what the dominant male said and rarely added anything. Even when I tried to persuade these quiet boys to answer, they tended to look to the leader of their group before saying anything and often he, without ever looking at them, answered for them and they eagerly agreed with whatever he said. Indeed, regardless of what any of these leaders said, the other members of his group always seemed keen to endorse it with much head nodding, rather than words. In each of these three groups the leader gave the impression of being very confident. He appeared to have little interest in what the others thought of him. He tended to sit rather stiffly and to be immobile or else he slouched. He rarely indulged in eye contact with anyone. Conversely, the other members of these groups tended to look nervously at each other and at myself but did not maintain eye contact with anyone. Judging by the fidgeting that took place, these boys were decidedly ill at ease and appeared to be almost afraid to say anything, lest it met with the leader's disapproval.

The other three groups in this category all had a leader who took up a position at the opposite end of the continuum from the above leaders. That is, they all spoke at length about the bullying they endured; bullying perpetrated by boys like the main speakers above. One of the leaders in this second category described, in a matter-of-fact way, how he was
continually kicked as he walked along the corridor and how he coped with it by "getting used to it". He thought that the behaviour of the 'hard men' was "stupid" and that they were "always trying to prove how tough they are". He was the only pupil in any group to be described by others as being academic. The PTG told me that he was very bright and that he had difficulty in socialising with his peers. By the way in which he spoke about himself he appeared to be an outsider and some pupils I spoke with attributed his problems to being "too clever". His partner in the group said little but did not appear to be ill at ease. He agreed with what the leader said although he did not say that he was victim of bullying himself.

In another group in this category the leader attributed most of his problems (which were many, it appeared) to racism. (He was one of 10 Asians in the second year). He was almost inarticulate in his anxiety to pour out his tale of woe and I had great difficulty in understanding him. I was not surprised when he told me that he took medication for the constant headaches from which he suffered. He said that his partner in the group was always being challenged to fights because he was the biggest boy in second year. The boy agreed that this was the case and added, with a shrug, that he "wasn't bothered". The leader often spoke for his partner who seemed quite willing to speak for himself but was not given much opportunity.

The last group in this section also had an Asian leader who
suffered a great deal from racist remarks. He, too, spoke for the other members of his group, describing the problems experienced by a Chinese boy who said little, other than that he wished he could speak English. The third boy in this group tried to say that he did not experience stress but the leader would not countenance this and cited several examples (such as having his woodwork broken and, regularly, being thrown into the hedge which grew along the side of the school) which the boy, with an apologetic look at me, agreed to but did not enlarge upon.

Both the other groups consisted of two boys who seemed more comfortable with each other. One of these couples worked well together, listened to each other, disagreed with each other and sometimes finished sentences for each other. I did note, however, that although they spoke quite freely about stress and coping and cited examples of stressors, none of these included personal illustrations. Indeed, they laughed and seemed embarrassed and made light of my enquiry as to whether they had experienced any of the stressors they mentioned.

The other pair in this category were both 'little boys' who described how they tried to support each other, with varying degrees of success, against the 'men' of the year who, they said, often bullied them "for no reason". Judging by the contempt with which they described them, they had little time for these boys or for the ones who tried to curry their favour by copying them.
The boys in the present school resembled those in the Pilot Study more closely than they did those in School A. In School A there were certainly pupils who fell into the categories described above but they were in the minority and the lines between categories were very blurred compared with the Pilot Study and this school. Generally speaking, the boys in the Pilot Study could be divided into two groups; the bullies and the bullied.

In this school there appeared to be three clear groups. In the first group there was a small number of boys who had established themselves, originally by their actions and later very often by words alone, as being 'hard' and 'macho'. Other pupils, if they did not actually fear these boys, treated them with respect even if they did not always feel respect for their behaviour.

In the second group were boys who identified with and tried to make friends with those in group one. They served their apprenticeship for acceptance by the 'hard men' by "taking dares" and, generally, "acting hard". Despite their efforts, I was told by several pupils (girls and boys), many boys in this category never quite made it to the ranks of the 'hard men' but were often used by them. It appeared that some of these boys were extremely poor judges of the risks involved in some of the dares they accepted and, therefore, were frequently caught in their misdeeds and subsequently ridiculed by the other pupils. No boy ever
admitted to me that such an experience had happened to him although several pupils described such events.

The third group was made up of those who were bullied. It consisted of two separate categories. In the first category were boys such as the bright boy and the 'little boys' described above, who did not identify with the 'hard men', who did not admire or agree with their behaviour and had no wish to emulate them. Although these boys admitted to having difficulties in coping with the unprovoked attacks they experienced at the hands of those in group one, they were able, to some extent, to talk about them in a detached manner. In a way, these boys were able to rationalise the behaviour of the 'hard men'. To a certain degree, they could understand what motivated them to act the way they did but, as such behaviour did not fit the image these boys had of themselves, they did not want to be part of it.

In the second category of those who were bullied were boys such as those subjected to racism and the boy who had to be reminded that he was bullied. I recalled the words of Anne, a pupil in School A, when she said:

A. You've got to play the bullies at their own game - get ahead of them, anticipate their moves...

These boys could not employ any of the tactics that Anne suggested because they did not know the game that the bullies were playing. From talking with and listening to them they did not appear to have any understanding of their
situations and, therefore, had no defence against them. This vulnerability, which was recognised by the bullies, served not merely to provoke further assaults but also to justify them on the grounds that such boys were "saps" and "deserved it for not standing up for themselves".

Although the boys were much more polarised than the girls, it must be made clear that the above groups are described in very broad terms and that not all boys could be classified as belonging to one of the three groups. For example, the two boys whom I have described above as working well together did not belong in any of the three groups.

In contrast with the girls and boys in School A and the girls in the Pilot Study but in keeping with the boys in the Pilot Study, the girls and boys in this school tended to describe each other in stereotypical terms. For example, it was interesting to note that several boys said that girls "only want to get married" or "only want to get a job until they get married" or "only want to stay at home and look after babies". I was interested in the use of the expression 'only want' as if these aims were worthless. Indeed, there was usually derision in the boys' voices as they made these pronouncements. When I questioned their statements, the boys admitted that they had not actually heard any girl state these aims but stressed that they knew it was "all that girls want". I was further interested to note that no girl I spoke to expressed 'only wanting' any of these things. A minority of the boys spoke as if they did
not particularly like the girls (they were dismissive of them) and a small number (as in the Pilot Study) complained that girls received better treatment from teachers.

Girls, too, spoke of the boys in rather extreme ways. They said that boys "have to show off and be funny"; they "have to give cheek to teachers"; they "have to make a lot of noise"; they "have to be hard and fight". I was interested in the use of the expression 'have to', as if it were compulsory to take part in these activities. Although many girls said that they did not admire such behaviour, describing it as "stupid" and "immature", they accepted it as part of the lot of being a boy. Indeed, they were almost as dismissive of some of the boys who did not behave in these ways as some of the 'hard men' were. They explained that boys 'have to' behave in the ways described above because "a lot is expected of them". In contrast, they said, "nobody expects much of girls". As with the boys above, the girls could not really explain what they meant but they knew it to be true.

All groups (with the exception of the two girls described above) were able to answer the research questions. In keeping with the other schools in the study, some groups and some individuals answered more fully than others.

6.5.3 First Group Conversation

Emma and Sara were two of the diligent workers in class 2E. When they had made themselves comfortable they explained
that they had volunteered to see me before any of the other
groups because they were concerned that I might be wasting
my time.

Emma explained that when she heard the reason I was in
school she was puzzled. Did I not realise that there was no
stress in the school, she asked. She conceded that, for
some pupils, there was a great deal of stress at home but
not in the school. Perhaps I should have gone to the school
further along the road. It was really tough, she said, and
the boys there were always fighting with the boys in this
school. She imagined that it would be very stressful there.
Sara endorsed Emma's sentiments. Emma said that she knew
that this school was supposed to be "common". This was news
to Sara, who expressed surprise. Emma produced as evidence
of the school's 'commonness' the fact that her brother had
told her so and that he had gone to another school. She
went on to say that her class was "guff" which she
translated for me as "rotten". Again, this was news to
Sara. Emma said that lots of people said it was "guff". To
back up her statement Emma began to describe her classmates.
First of all there were Betty, Grace and Kathy. Betty, she
said, was always absent and Grace and Kathy did not speak to
anyone and never knew the answers in class. They got teased
and picked on, she said, because they did not stand up for
themselves. Furthermore, they were fat and anyone who was
fat was slagged. Sara then took up the conversation and
described the two girls who wore Indian clothes. They were
always being slagged, she said. People asked them if they
got their clothes at the curtain factory. She did not think that it was very fair to comment on their dress but admitted that when she was cross with either of them she sometimes poked fun at their clothes. Neither girl would befriend those two because it would be too embarrassing to be seen with them in their funny clothes and people might laugh at Emma and Sara as well as at the other girls. Furthermore, they added, the girls smelt. Everyone told them so and they did nothing about it, Sara said with amazement. Next to be described were Alasdair, Steve and Hugh. They, I was told, were the male counterparts of Betty, Grace and Kathy. They spoke little out of class and even less in class. The girls did not think that teachers should ask them questions because they never knew the answer and people laughed at them and called them "thicko". Alasdair was also fat and dirty and was slagged on both these counts, said Sara.

Bruce, the boy described above as being academic, was "in a world of his own"; no one knew what he was talking about, they said. He was called the "professor" which he did not like, they added. Oliver was unkind to everyone, I was told. He had a "loud mouth" and "shows you up". Emma and Sara said that they rarely answered in class because it was embarrassing and Emma added that she always got a red face. She said that was "terrible" because the class would cry "you've got a beamer" and she would "just about die". Most of the teachers were "nice", they said, but some were "horrible". Emma recalled an incident the previous term when a teacher shouted at her for not paying attention and she had run sobbing from the room, pursued by Sara. She
explained that, at the time, her father "had just taken up with another woman" and everyone at home was very upset. She said that she had found it very difficult to come to school, could not concentrate on her work and had often burst into tears. The PTG had been very good, she added, and allowed Sara and herself to sit in the Guidance room when they should have been in lessons. She had not told any of her peers about the family break-up because she had witnessed other pupils being slagged when their parents split up.

The above information was reported in a very matter-of-fact way. None of the descriptions of the members of the class was said unkindly. The girls did not appear to dislike their classmates. They seemed to accept them but they certainly did not appear to understand them. For example, when I suggested that some of the situations they described might be very stressful for the protagonists I was told, with vehemence, that the pupils concerned "should do something about it". Emma explained that "they should stand up for themselves". Sara wholeheartedly agreed with Emma and added that she wouldn't wear funny clothes and that she would wash herself if people said she smelt. These people "brought it on themselves"; they were "saps".

I wondered if these girls and I understood the term 'stress' in quite different ways and asked them to remind me what they considered stress to be. They said that it was: "tension"; "it makes you anxious"; "you feel worried and
nervous". Among the sources of stress they suggested were: "family trouble"; "rows"; "being bullied". I again asked whether or not they considered the school to be stressful. They replied that it was not stressful; that it was a "good school" because "everybody gets on really well".

Details of four additional Group Conversations can be found in Appendix 51.

6.5.4 Summary of Pupils' Responses

An analysis of the responses to the research questions revealed that the patterns of stress and coping were very similar across pupils in all three schools. The pupils in the present school, however, placed greater emphasis on the stress arising from defective relationships with peers and were markedly less concerned with stress arising from school work than were the pupils in School A, especially. No pupil complained to the same extent that many in School A did about their inability to learn (either because the teacher failed to teach or because pupils disrupted the lesson). Teachers who did not control the class were described as "saps" and sometimes, if the pupil wanted to work, as a "nuisance" but most said that they joined in the uproar although some claimed to finish their work first. Unlike many pupils in School A no one in the present school (other than Christine, described below) spoke about long term career ambitions being put at risk because of poor teaching or noisy pupils. Nor were parents, as academic supports,
mentioned very often by the pupils. Some pupils did say that their parents told them to work hard (and many said that they "would get killed" if a letter of complaint was sent home) but no one described any practical help or suggestions their parents gave them. Sonia, a big, friendly, uninhibited girl who would have sat talking all morning, if allowed, said that her mother wanted her to do well in the examinations and described the support she received thus:

So. My mum never stopped nagging before the exams. She went on and on till she got on my dad's nerves and he told her to shut up and leave me alone. My mum said "I only want the best for her - you should try and help her instead of complaining". "Help her?" my dad said. "You're driving me bloody mad, woman". So my mum sulked and we all had a bit of peace.

Several situations were readily identified by the pupils as being stressful. As for the other schools in the study, the most frequently mentioned source of stress was that of bullying which was mentioned by each of the 19 groups. As with the boys in the Pilot Study, a high number of boys in the present school seemed almost obsessed with it. Those boys who admitted bullying others described it as being "good for a laugh", a "joke". It was almost as if their talking about it in a light-hearted way and laughing as they spoke made it less serious, less real. Whenever I tried to get the bullies to take the role of the bullied I did not get very far. Clearly the bullies could not, or did not want to, discuss this reversal of roles and frequently tried to bluff their way out by suggesting that I did not
understand, that I was taking their examples too seriously and that the situations were not like I was painting them. Essentially, bullying to those who bullied was a joke and those who complained had no sense of humour and deserved the treatment they received, perhaps for no other reason than they failed to be able to take a joke. Indeed, the apparent lack of sense of humour often supplanted the original excuse for the bullying.

Some boys seemed to 'rise above' the problem of bullying and were able to be friends with the bullies and the bullied without, apparently, becoming personally involved with either. Several victims of bullying identified these boys and seemed grateful for any support they were given by them. Some victims expressed a wish to be like these boys, whom they described as coping well with whatever happened.

Further details of bullying can be found in Appendix 52.

From talking with girls as well as with boys I learned that, among the boys, there was a very clear pecking order which appeared to be known to all. Boys from other classes and from the year above were described as "very hard" or "quite hard" or "thinks he's hard but he's not". Sometimes fights were arranged to clarify a position in the pecking order. Boys at the bottom of the ladder seemed to work as diligently to improve their positions as did those further up. The boys involved in this pursuit appeared to crave recognition and status and it was only those near the top
who achieved these aims. Those at the bottom were almost 'invisible' as were those (like the 'little boys') who were not in the rankings at all. Judging from the details that many boys gave of the 'pecking order game' it was evident that considerably more energy was devoted to it than was given over to academic activities. Perhaps that was hardly surprising when I learned how academic success was decried whilst 'hardness' was held in high regard.

Teachers, as a source of stress, were mentioned less frequently than in the other schools in the study. For Christine, however, the poor relationship she had with a teacher was not only a source of stress, it also forced her to reconsider her career plans as demonstrated in Appendix 53.

Zainab was one of the two girls in class 2E who wore Indian dress. She spoke of the problems she and her friends experienced because of their colour. She considered that the name-calling was very unfair because "you can't say the same things back" and nothing she did or said seemed to make much difference. She became quite excited and fidgety as she described her situation:

Z. They say things like "go back to your own country". When I tell them that my sister was born here - we belong here they say things like "how can you with a name and clothes like that?" What can you say? They call me a Paki. I didn't know what it was for a long time. My brother told me it was short for a Pakistani. When I told them I didn't come from Pakistan they said "you're all filthy Pakis". I told my mum - I couldn't tell my dad, I was too embarrassed. She told him and they discussed it and she came to see the PTG. I had to be there because my mum doesn't speak much English.
Zainab said it was "horrible" when pupils called her names and laughed at her clothes but it made her even more angry when they said bad things about her family. Her mother said that she could invite friends home but afterwards, in school, the visitors told others that her mother was lazy and dirty and the house smelt. She added that she had a white step-sister and that the other pupils asked Zainab about her but she said that they did not really want to know and that they were simply "looking for something to use against me".

Debbie formed part of the only group of four along with Sandra, Annabel and Hsueh Mei. They were rather a mixed quartet who said that they did not usually go around with each other. I was most impressed, however, by how well they worked together. Debbie said that when she had a problem and was unsure of how to deal with it she usually confided in her best friend, Sandra. Debbie conceded that on many occasions the stressor would probably be dealt with more quickly if she told an adult, perhaps a teacher or her mother. She described the situation in the following way:

D. It's easier to tell a friend. I tell Sandra things I wouldn't tell my mum. Maybe it's because she's my age I find it easier. Mums sometimes take the problem away from you and do things about it that you don't want or they help you in complicated ways. Your friend helps you in easy stages. I know how it feels but I can't find the words to explain.

The other three girls identified with what Debbie had said and emphasised the need to "work things out for yourself".
Sandra gave her reason for this:

Sa. Your mum means to help you but often she worries and does things like ring the school and you wish you'd never told her and then you have a row with your mum and worry what will happen when you come to school.

The four girls discussed this problem further and said that with some stressors (such as those which offered no immediate solution), it was necessary to "get used to it", to "think about it" and to "talk about it". This, they said, took time. Annabel, a large, very overweight girl with an almost permanent smile, explained what the result of taking these steps could be:

A. You know better what's bugging you and sometimes you know what you want to do. If you tell your mum at the beginning and she does something, that's OK at the time but if the problem comes again you haven't learned what to do because your mum did it so you've got to go to her again. You can't do that all your life.

Debbie added that she "might tell my mum afterwards when the worry's over but not at the beginning".

Pupils' comments on coping with verbal bullying are contained in Appendix 54.

As in the other schools in the study, pupils reported that the choice of coping strategy depended on such factors as the physical and psychological states of the individual; what else was going on for the person at the time; whether a particular coping strategy had worked previously in the same or a similar situation. In addition, some girls said that the "personality" of the individual played a role in
determining the choice of coping strategy and details of this can be found in Appendix 55.

As in the Pilot Study and in School A, pupils did use the same coping strategies in different situations but, usually, the individual was not consciously aware of doing this. It was only in the course of discussion that pupils found they had a particular style of coping that they used over a range of situations. Omar's comments on this aspect of coping along with some pupils' descriptions and evaluations of their coping strategies can be found in Appendix 56.

Many more boys were willing to say that they picked on their peers than in the other schools in the study. Such behaviour appeared to be so much part of the boys' subculture that it was not considered to be unusual or unacceptable by the perpetrators. Furthermore, the practice was so common that there did not seem to be any stigma attached to it. Unlike bullies (identified by other pupils, not by the bullies themselves) in the other two schools, many boys in the present school evaluated their behaviour positively. Conversely, the majority of bullies (identified to me by their peers) in the other schools described such behaviour as a sign of weakness and unhappiness on the part of the bully.

Almost all pupils said that talking about a stressor was probably the best way they could be enabled to cope. As in the other two schools, the pupils said that they would be
unwilling to share personal information with their classmates who would probably use it against them in some way at a later date. Annabel, however, who was one of the only quartet, said that she had been quite nervous when she arrived because she "wasn't that friendly with the others" and did not know "what I was letting myself in for". She went on to say that she thought she had got to know the other three girls a little better as a result of the Group Conversation and that it was interesting to learn that they had the same sorts of problems as she did. Further details of pupils' sharing stressors with others and pupils' sources of support can be found in Appendix 57.

The Guidance staff were generally regarded more positively by the pupils than they were in the other two schools. Indeed, many pupils, on being asked how they coped with particular stressors, said that they reported them to the Guidance teacher. Others were adamant that they would not do this because, as Oliver put it:

0. Most teachers are OK but they have power and if you tell them about yourself, things you don't have to, you'll give them more power because they're not going to say "you've told me something now let me tell you about my problem".

Further details of the guidance system can be found in Appendix 58.

6.5.5 Summary of and Reflections on Phase Two

All the Group Conversations took place on a Friday morning during the second half of the Spring term. Each
conversation lasted for 35 minutes and for approximately half of all the groups seen this amount of time was sufficient. All the research questions were covered in the course of the term but not all groups answered all questions. Occasionally, in the time permitted, I considered it more expedient to explore certain questions in depth with a particular group rather than attempt to cover all the questions.

After the first morning's Group Conversations I was aware that I seemed to have gathered a great deal of incidental information. It was only when I listened to the tapes that same evening that I became aware that, generally speaking, the pupils were less focused than those in the other schools in the study. That is, they frequently wandered off the subject to tell me about something incidental to the point under discussion. For example, when I asked Annabel to explain how she attempted to cope with a teacher who was picking on her, she immediately said that the teacher also picked on others and started to talk about the misfortunes of another girl. Similarly, when I asked Gavin to describe how he coped with the boy who broke his truck in woodwork, he began to tell me about the ways in which this same boy disrupted other lessons. I found that it was hard work, constantly to bring pupils back to the point I wanted to pursue. Often the tack the pupil had taken was interesting and relevant to the conversation but not necessarily at the point it was introduced. Therefore, I had to bear it in mind for discussion later as well as trying to ensure that
the pupils answered the question I had asked. In the other schools in the study pupils also wandered off the main point occasionally but I encountered this problem much more frequently in the present school.

Speaking in broad terms, the pupils seemed unaccustomed to considering questions in depth and I had to work quite assiduously, on many occasions, to get them to apply themselves to the question under discussion. I did not have the impression that most pupils were unwilling to respond but rather that they did not ask a great deal of themselves in answering. There was a tendency with several pupils to say that either they did not know the answer to a question or else they gave a brief response saying, if I questioned them further, that it was all they knew. However, I soon learned that if I dug deeper they usually produced more information but would not have done so on their own. For the most part they seemed content with the first answer they thought of and rarely added to it of their own accord. I was reminded of the Headteacher's efforts to persuade class 2M to answer during Social Education. It was only after much probing and re-phrasing of questions that the class came up with answers that satisfied her. Although the exercise of digging for information was an interesting and, frequently, rewarding one I nevertheless found it very hard work at times.

Tied up with the above problem, the pupils handled silences differently from those in the other two schools. As
mentioned above, some sat almost totally motionless and made absolutely no attempt to contact me at all; not even with an embarrassed glance. Others used the silence to think about something else and these pupils often filled the gap with a different topic of conversation. Seldom did they amplify their original answer which was my aim in allowing a silence to develop.

I was interested to note that school work as a source of stress was mentioned very rarely and that teachers, as stressors, were discussed less frequently than in the other two schools. The pupils in the present school placed much greater emphasis on the stress they experienced in the social relationships with their peers both in and out of school. Parents, as academic supports, were seldom mentioned and the pupils were less ambitious career-wise than the pupils in either of the other schools in the study. Very few pupils, compared with School A especially, mentioned the academic success (which could act as a spur or be a source of stress) of an older sibling. Conversely, no pupils (unlike some in both the Pilot Study and School A) said that parents expected them to do well at school because older siblings had failed to succeed. Several pupils (mainly boys) spoke positively about Youth Training Schemes (YTS) and added that they probably would join such a scheme when they left school. Conversely, pupils in School A rarely mentioned YTS and those who did held it in low regard. A much higher number of pupils than in either of the other two schools spoke of taking problems to the PTG.
It must be stressed that the above observations are generalisations. There were several individuals in the present school who answered more fully and more thoughtfully, without any prompting from me, than some individuals in either of the other schools in the study. Additionally, there was a number of pupils who discussed problems with staff as well as talking about stress associated with school work.

For the most part the pupils were very friendly and as I walked to school on a Friday morning I often met second year pupils who were willing not only to speak or wave to me but also to wait for me so that we could walk to school together.

6.6 PHASE THREE: INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS

6.6.1 Introduction

As with School A, and for the reasons given above, the Individual Conversations took place one year after the Group Conversations. They were conducted, therefore, during the Spring term of the pupils' third year. The same three classes, which had become 3E, 3H and 3M, took part in the extended research programme. The aims for this phase of the study were in keeping with those for School A outlined in section 5.5.
Details of re-negotiating entry, re-establishing rapport with the pupils and the format for the Individual Conversations can be found in Appendix 59.

6.7 FINDINGS FROM THE INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS

Details of the total number of Individual Conversations, the allocation of time, problems with accommodation and building trust are contained in Appendix 60.

6.7.1 Marion and Ali: Two Persistent Truants

Marion had become an increasingly irregular attender since the beginning of the school year whilst Ali had not been in school since the end of second year. Marion (described in Appendix 51) had a poor relationship with several teachers because of frequent shouting and answering back. Ali, described above as taking medication for constant headaches, had painted a picture of himself as a victim of bullying and racism. When I met Marion and Ali during the Group Conversations they both seemed very uncomfortable with themselves and there was a frenetic air about them, which I found quite unsettling. It did not altogether surprise me to learn that they no longer attended school.

The PTG told me that Marion's mother had "more or less washed her hands of Marion". Apparently the mother had enough to do trying to run the home without coming to the school "every other week to sort out Marion's problems".

Dialogue between the deputy Headteacher and Marion's mother
had broken down on several occasions when the mother had resorted to shouting and swearing at him. Finally the mother said that she was not coming to the school again. The school, however, would not have Marion back until the mother came to the school. The PTG said that she was trying to get Marion into a centre which provided alternative education for pupils who had difficulty fitting into mainstream education. However, communication with the mother was proving to be very difficult because she had become increasingly abusive and defensive.

Ali, I was told by several pupils, had "gone off his trolley" at the end of second year. He was so "fed up being picked on", Kenny said, that he tried to outdo the bullies at their own game. He informed them of his intention to hold up the owner of the corner shop with a gun. No one believed him; they "laughed at him", Kenny said. However, such was Ali's desperation to be accepted by his peers that he did attempt to do as he had threatened and was caught by the police with an air gun. Not only was he in trouble with the law, he was also the laughing stock of the second year. He had not returned to school. The PTG, who confirmed the above story, said that Ali had to tolerate many problems at home. His mother was mentally ill. She had eight children, the youngest of whom was nine months old and she was pregnant again. However, the PTG had succeeded in obtaining a place for Ali at the above-mentioned centre, where he was now a regular attender.
6.7.2 Differences between Group and Individual Conversations

Many of the stressful situations described in the Individual Conversations were essentially 'daily hassles' and pupils (as in the other schools in the study) were often ashamed of their inability to cope effectively. For example, Jock, who had not taken part in the Group Conversation because of his absence, spoke at length about his journey home from school each day. Jock was a big, thickset, loutish-looking boy with a skinhead haircut. Appearances, however, can be deceptive and I learned from listening to Jock that he was a gentle boy who said "I want no trouble". He explained that, when school was over each afternoon, he and his younger brother took a bus going in the opposite direction from their home "to get away from trouble". He said that he was forever being challenged to a fight by boys from the nearby school. It appeared that well-built, tough-looking boys were often challenged to prove themselves by other boys and, although Jock could be described in this way, he had no desire to prove anything and this was a source of stress for him. (The same problem had also been raised by Ali in the Group Conversation when he said that his partner was frequently challenged to fights because he was the biggest boy in second year). Because of Jock's unwillingness to fight, the boys were threatening to beat his young brother instead. The problem was exacerbated because his mother was complaining of the expense incurred by the additional bus journeys and was planning to come to school "to put an end to this nonsense". Jock was pleading with her "not to show
me up in front of the teachers" and his young brother was also sworn to secrecy about the situation. He said that he felt "terrible" every afternoon, could not concentrate on his work and dreaded the end of the school day. He was always afraid that the boys would be waiting for him outside the school. The only solution to the problem that Jock could think of was to change schools.

Many more pupils than in either of the other two schools spoke about stressors in the home during this phase of the study. Indeed, some pupils spoke about little else. For several of these people school, and all that happened therein, was almost irrelevant. Many seemed to use school simply as a bolt hole from the horrors of home; a harbour to enter for some peace between the domestic storms. Most had little energy to devote to matters academic although some did say that they tried to concentrate very hard in order to forget about home. Fiona, who said that she had been absent because of "tension headaches and trouble at home" during the Group Conversations, spoke of nothing but the stress she, her sister and her parents had experienced because of the threatened break-up of the family. She had eventually confided in the PTG, when she was in second year, and had felt better as a result, she said. She had told no other teachers although several had commented to her that she was not her "usual cheery self". She had chosen also not to tell any of her school friends and was now glad that she had made this decision. She explained that her parents were still together (although the relationship was extremely
unstable) and if she had confided in her peers they would want to know why the parents had not separated. She went on to say that she had observed the lives of other girls, in similar situations, being made even more difficult than they already were by the gossip and unkind remarks of their peers. Her only ally was her sister who was in first year and they tried to console each other as best they could. As with so many pupils who described their difficult home backgrounds, Fiona sounded wistful and older than her 14 years. She (along with many pupils in similar situations) was able to describe her situation very clearly and with very little help from me, although she said that she had not previously put into words much of what she told me. Some pupils, when they spoke, were very upset and close to tears, others were very angry. Fiona, however, in common, it appeared, with those whose unhappy situation had dragged on for some time, described it in a curiously detached manner, almost as if it had happened to someone else. She sat, almost in a trance, looking into the middle distance as she spoke. I always felt humbled and somehow honoured to be privy to so much personal information and private pain. There was nothing I could do; the pupils knew this and expected nothing, yet gave so much.

I learned in this phase of the study that several girls (and a smaller number of boys) had a very close relationship with their mother and some of these girls said that it was "just natural" and "easy" for women to talk together. These girls often, but not always, were the oldest in a family where the
father had either left home or where communication between
the parents had broken down. It appeared in many of these
cases that the girl had become almost a peer to the mother.
Some of these girls (like Victoria in School A described in
Appendix 36) sounded very grown up and used expressions and
turns of phrase more appropriate to an adult than a 14 year
old. From simply listening, I was soon able to guess, with
considerable accuracy, which pupils lived with only one
parent. Several, after stating an opinion, often added,
"well, that's what my mum says". On some occasions, when
these pupils were describing the stressful situations they
experienced I felt younger and more inexperienced than they.

Additional differences between Group and Individual
Conversations along with pupils' perceptions of Group and
Individual Conversations can be found in Appendix 61.

In common with the other schools in the study no pupil
mentioned seeking emotional support from a male member of
the family. Only one pupil, Alasdair, actually spoke about
his father in more than a passing way.

6.7.3 Case Study of Alasdair

Alasdair (described in Appendix 51) had grown even bigger
and fatter than he had been in second year. He looked
unwashed and his badly bitten nails were engrained with
dirt. He wore a black, imitation leather jacket which was
torn and trousers which, by the look of them, he had long
since worn out and out-grown. Despite the somewhat
unpleasant picture he presented, I was rather fond of Alasdair. He was a serious, vulnerable-looking boy who seemed very much as if he wanted to please. He came across to me as innocent and quite without guile. He was extremely limited academically, according to the PTG and his classmates, and he said that he had been bullied since first year. He said that school was "OK" but could not actually mention anything he liked about it.

He told me that, at the end of the Spring term in second year, his father had "gone off with his girl friend" leaving Alasdair with his mother and young sister who had Down's syndrome. Alasdair had been very upset at the loss of his father. He explained that, when his father left home to live with his girl friend, he saw him only on a Friday afternoon. When school finished at lunch time on that day, Alasdair had gone to his father's workplace and spent the time talking to him. He said that he had wanted to go to live with his father but this was not possible because the girl friend had a "drink problem" and was given to violence when drunk. In any case, he added, the girl friend did not want him. At home, the situation was not much better. The mother did not have a job and there was little money. Added to that, Alasdair had to share a bedroom with his sister who snored and kept him awake. He said that he regularly lay in bed listening to her snoring and thinking about the ways in which he wished his life was different. Slowly, he became depressed, he told me, and by the beginning of the third year he felt "very lonely and very, very unhappy". All he
could think about was how he missed his father and how he wanted to be with him. He spoke to no one about his concerns. School, which had never been easy for Alasdair, either academically or socially, became unbearable and he began truanting. Each morning he left home, ostensibly to go to school, and wandered about the city on his own. Sometimes he sat on the swings in the park, at other times he sheltered in the woods. Frequently he was cold and wet and always he was desperately unhappy, he said. He had been truanting (always on his own) for a little over two months when, just before the Christmas holiday, the PTG had contacted his mother about his prolonged absence from school. Alasdair, his mother and the PTG had met to discuss the situation and Alasdair had returned to school at the beginning of this particular term. Nothing had really changed, he said, other than he was now coming to school. He rarely saw his father who, he told me, had "taken to the drink". Life at home was a little better because his mother now had a job as a cleaner which meant that there was some more money. However, because the mother worked early in the morning as well as in the evening, it also meant that Alasdair had to get his sister up and fed (she attended a day centre) in the morning and he could not go out in the evening because he had to mind her until their mother returned. He said that he did not enjoy school any longer but could not give any reasons. He suddenly perked up when he remembered that he now had a friend, Robert, (the boy who had to be reminded that he was bullied) but added that he did not like him very much because he was a "sap" and
"didn't stand up for himself". Alasdair said, with a certain amount of pride in his voice, that he, unlike Robert, was "learning to stand up for myself". When I asked what this involved, he explained that he was not afraid to walk past the school along the road (mentioned above). Robert, who lived beside that school, apparently took a long route home rather than walk past it. (Indeed, according to Alasdair, Robert was quite likely to walk out of his way "if he saw a big dog in the distance"). The PTG, he added, was trying to obtain a place for him "at a place that's better than here". From his description, I could build no picture of what he meant. He neither knew where the place was nor what was done there and, seemingly, he had never asked. The PTG later told me that it was the centre for alternative education. It was interesting that Alasdair, with a little help from me, managed to tell his story very clearly but was frequently unable to respond to or to answer, in a way that I understood, some of the questions I asked.

A series of seven case studies is contained in Appendix 62. The first is that of Bruce who was experiencing both social and academic problems when we met in second year. These difficulties arose, I was told by the PTG, because of his being considerably brighter than his peers. He said that he was happier now that he was in third year because he had learned to handle himself differently.

The second case study describes Betty (who is mentioned in Appendix 51). At the time of our Individual Conversation
she was in care because of truancy and suspected sexual abuse.

Zainab, who is the focus of the next case study, had described the racist remarks she suffered when we spoke in second year. Since then she had grown considerably and seemed to be much more self-assured. Her Individual Conversation revealed how she had learned, from bitter experience, to be wary of her white peers.

The fourth case study describes Linda who formed a group of two when we spoke together in second year. Both girls seemed very anxious and the least able (as opposed to unwilling) of all groups in the study to answer my questions. When we met in third year Linda was equally unsure of herself and, despite my efforts, I failed to make any meaningful connection with her.

Fergus, who was a rather dishevelled loner when we met in second year had smartened up considerably when I saw him for the Individual Conversation. Although he described himself as being happier than he had been in second year he still had no friends and was frequently involved in fights both in and out of school.

Grace was a small, quiet girl who, because she was an outsider in the class, had made friends with two other outsiders. When I met the trio for the Group Conversation (described in Appendix 51) Grace had little to say.
However, she was extremely talkative during the Individual Conversation because of a stressful episode which had taken place the previous day.

Zaki, the new Iranian, was the only pupil who had not taken part in a Group Conversation. He came across to me as one of the most mature pupils with whom I spoke in the present school. He described his situation in a very thoughtful and insightful way and his story forms the final case study.

6.7.4 Summary of Pupils' Responses

As far as school, itself, was concerned, there appeared to be fewer differences between the sources of stress in second and third years than there were in School A. This might be accounted for by the fact that the present school was so much smaller than School A and the pupils (unlike those in School A) seemed to be well acquainted with their peers in other classes before entering third year. Furthermore, most of the staff were already known to the pupils. Conversely, in School A many pupils encountered new teachers in third year and their conflicting styles of approach, had proved to be stressful for several of these pupils.

In the present school, there appeared to be very little academic competition between the pupils and, therefore, there was no mention of the stress involved in trying to keep up with their peers now that classes were often organised according to ability. In addition, there was no
mention of being rid of pupils who had no interest in school work. Indeed, there was scant mention of the classes being streamed according to ability. In attitudes to school work, the pupils were much more homogeneous than those in School A. Very few people spoke about an increased academic work load either in school or at home. In fact, homework was rarely mentioned. It actually appeared that very little homework was given but, unlike a few pupils in School A who expressed concern over a lack of homework, no pupils in the present school suggested that more homework would be to their advantage.

Some pupils were glad to be rid of certain members of staff. Usually this was because they had a poor relationship with these teachers, rather than their being unable to progress academically because the teachers were either poor communicators of their subject or poor disciplinarians.

The majority of pupils said that, as second year was better than first, so third year was better than second. The reasons for this were similar to those given in School A. Only one pupil (in the whole study) said that she preferred second year to third year. This exception was Sonia who, when I met her the previous year, was a large, lively, outspoken girl. When we met in third year she appeared decidedly less sure of herself, although she still had plenty to say. When she presented herself for the Individual Conversation, she flopped into the chair and said, "Am I glad to see you! I'm just full of stress". She
made it sound like a bad cold. Sonia's story can be found in Appendix 63.

A new source of stress mentioned by several boys (but no girls) was that of physical development. Some boys spoke about whether they had grown since second year, whether their voices had broken, whether their muscles were well enough developed and whether they had, or almost had, a moustache. (No boy in School A mentioned such concerns). One boy asked if I intended to come back the following year because he hoped to have a moustache by then. Physical development was one of the few topics of conversation that held Donald's interest (a very reticent boy who, according to the PTG, did not relate well to women) for a very short time. The only other area (that I could discover) which appeared to hold any appeal for Donald was football training with the under 16 squad, against whom he pitted and measured himself. Those boys whose physical development lagged behind that of their peers were given short shrift by the more physically advanced and treated in much the same way as the 'little boys' in School A. Latif, who was very much a 'Jack-the-Lad' and prided himself on being accepted by the "hardest in the school", spoke about how he baited a rival with his lack of physical development:

L. There's this new boy and he's really hard and well dressed but he's got a high voice so I tell everyone he's gay. I don't think he is but you've got to say it to keep him down or he'll say something to get at me.

There might have been little or no academic competition
among the pupils but the competition, among boys, to be the 'top dog' physically and psychologically was an on-going one. And the stress resulting from this pursuit, it appeared, was equal to that stemming from academic competition in School A.

Some pupils reported that "some stresses have been there since first year" and they explained that they wished others "didn't muck about in lessons" because they inevitably joined in. These pupils spoke as if they had no choice in the matter and perhaps (unlike School A) because the core of hard workers was so small they did not feel strong enough to group together to defend themselves against the disrupters. Bruce, as he had been in second year, was one of the very few pupils who appeared to work diligently. He said that he was "fed up with people not working" and spoke about a cover teacher who "only had to give us a Physics test":

B. When the test was over, the teacher didn't even know what to do with it (said with amazement) and she let us take it home. Everybody just copied the answers. I had revised and felt rotten about the whole thing. I got depressed thinking about it at home. Sometimes I get depressed in school - it's so dirty and dull. I feel I could get germs - sometimes I worry about that. No wonder people don't work - the place is so horrible it puts you off.

The dichotomy between home and school was also a source of stress for Bruce. His views on this stressor, along with those of Mary, can be found in Appendix 64.

Many more pupils in the present school than either of the other two schools spoke about the stress resulting from
having the 'wrong' clothes. Details of the pupils' comments are contained Appendix 65.

Further examples of the differences in sources of stress between second year and third year can be found in Appendix 66.

Since being in third year Isobel said that she had learned to cope differently with certain situations. She explained how she had made a conscious effort to cut out visible signs of nervousness:

I. Sally said she always knows when I feel stressful because I jiggle my leg and my foot. I didn't believe her but then I found I was doing it. I decided to stop and whenever I start to feel stressful I think, "keep still; don't jiggle your leg". Sometimes it works and I try to look at the person who is making me feel nervous. I know it doesn't sound a lot but it's an improvement for me and it gives me confidence. Sometimes I'm concentrating so hard on keeping still and looking at the person I don't really hear what they're saying. It's harder to keep looking than to stop jiggling my leg - it's easier to look away. I'd never answer a teacher back like some people but I can look at them now. I still feel nervous inside but I try not to let it show and when I manage I feel better about myself.

Playing in the school orchestra had also enhanced Isobel's confidence which, she said, had spilled over to other areas of her life. She spoke about it in the following way:

I. When I played in my first concert I was so worried and nervous that I wished the concert would be cancelled. I play the flute and couldn't breathe right because I was so nervous. When you've done it once it's never so bad after that - you're still nervous but you just tell yourself "you managed it last time". You begin to feel a bit more confident and you find you can do other things -like- last Christmas I had to take back a jumper to the shop that had shrunk. I didn't like doing it but I did it. Mind you, my mum made me -but I couldn't have done it last year.
In Appendix 67, seven pupils describe the changes which had taken place in their lives and the ways in which these changes affected their coping strategies.

The first of these was Latif (described in Appendix 51) for whom "going about with older guys" had resulted in his coping differently with many situations.

The second, Oliver (described in Appendix 51), did not appear to have grown one centimetre from when I saw him the previous year. We met in the Assistant Headteacher's office and he sat in a very large easy chair, his arms on the arm rests, his legs spread wide apart and his feet dangling approximately six inches from the floor. He reminded me of a little old man, rather than a 15 year old pupil. He was very serious and rather self-important, I thought, but he was as loquacious as I remembered and worked very hard to articulate his thoughts and opinions on stress and coping. His major achievement, since we last met, was to have been accepted by some older boys in his neighbourhood.

Kathy (described in Appendix 51), the third pupil, who was usually to be seen with Betty and Grace, said that she was happier than she had been in second year because she had more friends. She explained that she had been slagged a great deal in second year and that she had been miserable because she had been at a total loss as to how to deal with the situation.
Since being in third year, the fourth pupil, Zainab (described in Appendix 62) said that she had learned to cope differently with several situations and she described her reasons for changing coping strategies as well as talking about the coping strategies themselves.

The fifth pupil, Sally, was a tall, shy girl who displayed a great ability to analyse her situations. She said that she was not coping very differently from the previous year and attributed her lack of progress to her continuing inability to deal with a specific problem at home.

Far fewer pupils said that they took part in extra-curricular activities, fewer belonged to clubs and fewer had a part-time job compared with the pupils in School A. The sixth pupil, Hugh, however, said that he had joined the Boys' Brigade, as a coping strategy, at the end of second year.

The final pupil, Sara, along with Emma, (described in section 6.5.3) had taken part in the first Group Conversation in order to advise me that I might be wasting my time because they considered that there was no stress in the school. When we met in third year Sara looked very grown up and made-up and described her job in a cafe.

Pupils gave a wide variety of reasons for having changed their coping strategies since we last met. Generally
speaking, it appeared that the more situations with which pupils could cope successfully, the more likely they were to experience enhanced self-esteem. In turn, the confidence gained from the successful coping generated more confidence, enabling pupils to try to cope with previously stressful situations as well as with new situations. It appeared that confidence was needed to generate confidence whilst a lack of confidence seemed to spawn further self doubt.

Several pupils reported that they had gained in confidence as a result of having to make telephone calls as part of the Life and Work module of Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). All third year pupils had to visit a variety of businesses in Edinburgh as part of the above course. The pupils had been involved in a great deal of planning and organisation before their visits and those who mentioned Life and Work spoke of how much they enjoyed the experience and emphasised the relevance of it. Debbie described her experience:

D. I'd only ever 'phoned my pals before and was really nervous having to ring this travel agent to ask if we could go and ask them questions. We were all nervous and laughing and kept saying, "you do it" and I'd say, "no, you do it". We went on like that for ages and then I said I'd do it. We should do more things like that - go out and speak to people in offices and things. It's much more interesting than things like Science and people don't say, "You've got 100 lines for not listening". I think I learned more doing that than I've done in school all term because you're seeing things you'll be doing when you leave school.

Kathy also reported that the experience of telephoning companies had given her more confidence but only to make more telephone calls. The confidence, however, had not
spread into other areas of her life. Kenny, however, considered that he had, generally, become more confident both as a result of being a member of a golf club and mixing with adults as well as taking part in the Life and Work module which involved him in liaising with members of a golf club.

This positive attitude to TVEI was in total contrast with that of the majority of pupils in School A. There, the pupils were the first in the school to take part in TVEI. In order to accommodate it the pupils were denied the opportunity of studying Latin or Greek which had previously been an option available to third year pupils. Several pupils, when in second year, expressed their resentment at having to do a subject which would result in their being awarded a certificate but which would not have the equivalent academic 'weight' to another Higher. When I spoke with these pupils in third year TVEI was seen as "fun", a "change from lessons" and a "break from the slog" because it "didn't really matter".

Fiona, who suffered from tension headaches and was on medication, reported that she had learned how to cope from watching her mother. She explained that her mother suffered from myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). Frequently, she said, her mother told her how unwell she had felt several days previously. Fiona, however, had been unaware at the time because:
F. My mum always puts a brave face on things and you don't find out till later that she wasn't feeling well and had to go to bed. I admire her for doing that because she has a lot to put up with. I try and do it too. If you try really hard you can sometimes forget your problems for a while. People are friendlier as well if you're not miserable.

Fiona said that her mother had given her some other advice which she intended to follow:

F. Another lesson I've learned from my mum is that you can't rely on other people to do things for you - you've got to look out for yourself. My dad didn't want my mum to work so she gave up her job ages ago and then when they weren't getting on he wouldn't give her any money - said he'd worked for it - it was his. Me and my sister couldn't come to school for ages because we'd no proper shoes and my dad wouldn't give us money for any. My mum's warned me never to do what she did and give up your job.

Annabel was as large and overweight as I remembered her in second year. She also had the same ready smile. As Fiona had done, Annabel said that she had learned from her mother how to cope with certain situations:

A. My mum never lets it show if things get on top of her. She always makes the best of things. I'm the same. I don't see the point in moaning. People don't like moaners so I just try and smile and I feel better because people are friendly. My mum's the same, always laughing and joking even when she doesn't feel like it. Her whole family's like that and I've got it from them. My mum says, "laugh and the world laughs with you". I think she's right. I don't let things get me down. People who do that find it harder to cope, I think. It's all in the mind. I might laugh at something that somebody else would cry about but that's just because I make myself laugh and I've done it for so long that I just do it now without thinking. It's become a habit.

Gavin was one of the two 'little boys' I saw for the group Conversation. When we met in third year he could still, because of his slight physical stature, have been mistaken
for a first year pupil but was most thoughtful and articulate in his approach to the research questions. He began the session by reminding me of what he had told me in second year. He then suggested that being ashamed of something could prevent a person from developing effective coping strategies. Gavin's story, along with those of Jane and Sally can be found in Appendix 68.

6.7.5 Summary of Phase Three

The Individual Conversations were carried out each morning during two weeks in the second half of the Spring term of the pupils' third year. Each conversation lasted for 40 minutes which allowed sufficient time to cover the research questions. Five pupils, which I found to be a manageable number, were seen in the course of a morning.

The accommodation arrangements proved to be a problem throughout the two weeks I was in school and I spoke with the pupils in a variety of settings which were frequently less than ideal. In addition, the pupils and I were often interrupted during our time together. I am sure, however, that I was more unsettled by the upheaval than any of the pupils were.

As with the other schools in the study, the pupils were much more willing to talk openly during this phase of the study and to discuss the personal stressors they experienced as well as the coping strategies they used, than they were in the Group Conversations. There was wide mention of
stressors originating in the home during this phase of the study. The majority of pupils preferred the Individual to the Group Conversation because, apart from not having to censure their responses, they were able to discuss problems and aspects of problems previously unvoiced.

During this phase of the study I continued to meet and talk with staff. In addition, I was invited to join the Headteacher and Guidance staff when they met for lunch each week.

I often met and spoke with the teacher responsible for Special Needs. Although several teachers had voiced their opinion that there was little stress in the school, it rather surprised me to learn that she shared their view. This teacher (who came across to me as a very caring lady whose room was always open to pupils before school began) was dealing with pupils like Grace, Kathy, Alasdair, Steve, Linda and Donna who were frequently ridiculed and laughed at, yet she described the pupils as being "very tolerant of each other".

6.7.6 Reflections on Phase Three

Throughout this phase of the study I was somewhat surprised at how little the pupils spoke about school in general and about academic work in particular. I was aware, as a result of the Group Conversations, that the majority of the pupils I met were not academically ambitious. However, academic
work was placed even further into the background than it had been in second year and some pupils made no mention of it at all. Relationships with staff were mentioned less frequently and teachers seemed to be less important than they were in School A. This might have been because, in the present school, academic progress was of little interest whereas in School A pupils often complained that they were unable to learn because of defective pupil/staff relations.

The main focus of so many of the conversations was on life out of school and the effect that this had on transactions in school. Although the research questions were looking at stress in school, many pupils preferred to talk about stress and coping out of school, with the emphasis usually on the home situation. The more troubles there were at home, the more school, and all that took place therein, became increasingly stressful with the result that several pupils opted out of school altogether.

6.8 PHASE FOUR: ATTENDING LESSONS WITH SELECTED PUPILS

The aim for this phase of the study was to attend lessons for one day with each of four pupils during the course of one week. The pupils were identified as a result of the Individual Conversations and were selected according to the criteria detailed in section 5.7 and placed in the categories outlined in section 4.7.3. In addition, and as a result of this phase of the study in School A, I decided to see the selected pupils the morning after I had accompanied
them to lessons so that we could discuss the events of the previous day. By allowing the extra time to reflect I hoped that the pupils would be able to stand back and take a broader perspective on what had taken place.

It had been my intention to attend lessons with the selected pupils immediately after Phase Three was completed. However, several outings involving third year pupils had been arranged for the last few weeks of term and I decided to postpone Phase Four until the following term. As the third year examinations were scheduled to take place during the first two weeks, I chose to attend lessons during the third week of the Summer term.

6.8.1 Selection of Pupils

Selection proved to be much more difficult than in School A. Many pupils were eminently suitable in that they were able to talk about stress and coping in an insightful way. During the course of the Individual Conversations I mentioned my plans for Phase Four (as I had done in School A) to several of these suitable pupils. However, some of them were clearly unwilling to have me with them for a day. Among the reasons given were: "I'd get slagged"; "people would think I'd done something"; "I'd have to be good all day"; "I couldn't be myself"; "you don't know what it's like in some classes"; "teachers would think I was in trouble"; "what would my pals say?". On hearing these and similar comments I began to wonder what dreadful oversight I had made. I did not altogether understand what could be so
awful about having me present in class. After all, I had explained that if the selected pupils did not want me to sit with them I was quite prepared to sit elsewhere in the class and, ostensibly, to ignore them during lessons. Furthermore, I had made it clear that, although I would be with them in class and moving from one lesson to another, they would be free at break and at lunch time. I did appreciate that, for some pupils, my presence might be the last straw but I had selected those whom I considered to be relatively confident as well as articulate and many of them were rejecting my request without a second thought. I must emphasise that I made no attempt whatsoever to persuade any pupil to reconsider her/his decision. I was determined to attend lessons only with the pupils' full consent. I considered again the opinions of so many staff and pupils when they said that this was not a stressful school and wondered what the essential problem was. Indeed, I very much looked forward to attending lessons with whoever would allow me.

Eventually five pupils (three girls and two boys) agreed to my attending lessons with them. For the purposes of the research I needed only four pupils (I kept the fifth as a reserve but did not use him) because I proposed to attend lessons from Monday to Thursday (Friday being a half day for pupils) as I had done in School A. After examining the pupils' timetables I followed the same procedure as I had done in School A (see Appendix 43) in deciding which pupil to accompany on what day.
6.8.2 Categorisation of Pupils

Because of the problem of finding willing pupils, I was unable to place any of the five who agreed to my request in category (iii), not experiencing stress. Indeed, despite the fact that I had been told that this was not a stressful school, there was not really any pupil I would have categorised as not experiencing stress. Perhaps Annabel or Latif were the nearest I would have come to placing a pupil in this category. However, Annabel's first concern was, "They'd laugh at me. I'd be too embarrassed", whilst Latif replied, "I'm not sure; it would depend". Latif reminded me a little of Euan in School A (the one pupil whom I placed in category (iii) and who is described in section 5.7.1 and Appendix 45) but was quite without his social confidence, charm and easy manner.

Alex, whom I classified as being in category (i), experiencing stress and not coping well, was not only willing, he was absolutely delighted to have me attend lessons with him. He was one of the most talkative and open pupils in the whole study and he used our time together to give me details of his life from when he was a baby up to, and including, the day I attended lessons with him.

Alex was one of the two 'little boys' who, in the Group Conversation, were both willing and able to describe the stress associated with the almost constant bullying they
experienced at the hands of their peers. When we met in third year Alex was going through a very bad patch at home which was having an adverse affect on his life in school and which, in my opinion, placed him firmly in category (i).

Alex lived with his mother, younger brother and the mother's boyfriend. He had suffered from epilepsy from the age of two and the onset had coincided with his father's leaving home. His mother had re-married but subsequently divorced her second husband whom Alex described as coming home drunk and beating and arguing with his mother. Whilst these physical and verbal assaults were taking place, Alex and the young brother hid behind the sofa. The present boyfriend was described as moody and given to lashing out, if crossed. Alex spoke about him in the following way:

A. I quite liked him at the beginning but he's got worse. I don't trust him now and he's not very good to my mum. Sometimes he doesn't speak to us for days; sometimes he hits us and my brother's only wee; and sometimes he's nice and takes us out. I just wish he'd leave. If he's still there when I'm 16 I'm going to stay with my grand dad. He's my mum's dad and his wife died of cancer. Sometimes I do his housework and cook for him. He's a bus driver and works shifts.

Alex's mother worked but did not make much money:

A. My mum's not a lot of help because there's not much money to go round and she often drinks it and then says there's no money for food. She's not very good with money, really. She says she needs a drink because she gets depressed. She's a bit of a pain, really (said in a very casual way.)

He explained that since the beginning of third year there had been a great many arguments at home about the lack of money. Recently their house had been burgled and a
television, video recorder and music centre stolen. The police, he said, had been suspicious because there was no sign of a break-in. Further investigations revealed that the mother's boyfriend had arranged for two of his friends to steal the equipment, with the intention of selling it to make some money. (They were now awaiting trial which added to the tension in the home). During this time Alex had been having more epileptic fits than usual as well as complaining of constant stomach ache. He began truanting and going home saying that he was unwell which, he added, was not entirely untrue. Just after Christmas he was taken into hospital with suspected appendicitis. When he was operated on, the appendix was found to be quite healthy but Alex said that a nerve in the area of the appendix had been removed which resulted in a feeling of numbness in his abdomen. Although the stomach pain was less severe he said that it had not gone. Because of his truanting and hospitalisation he failed to make any headway with Accounts which was a new subject to him in third year. He began to dread going to the class because "it was all gibberish" and he started missing the lesson. One day, he said, he was standing in a bus shelter feeling very sad and lonely when he saw an advertisement asking for volunteers to help raise money for people in the third world. He rang the telephone number mentioned in the advertisement and was sent details of the scheme. He was required to fast for one day and to find sponsors who were prepared to support him, financially, in his venture. This he did and he reported the feeling of achievement he experienced not only when he succeeded in his
task but also when his sponsors trusted him with their money. During the Individual Conversations the pupils were involved in raising money for Comic Relief. Alex, sounding like a weary old man, explained that his peers were buying red noses, not because they wanted to help other people, but simply because their friends were doing it:

A. They give the money but they don't think about what they're doing. They don't really care. It's all a bit of a laugh to them. They miss the point of it all, really. When you're fasting all day you've got a lot of time to think about the people who are much worse off than you are and who can't help themselves.

The day I accompanied Alex to lessons, both he and his clothes were extremely dirty. He said, in a very matter-of-fact way, that the other pupils called him a "tramp". However, he had long since decided that there was little he could do about that as, often, there was not enough money at home to buy essentials. He said that he supposed the school could do something about the slagging but that the basic problem originated in his home, about which no one at school could do anything.

One good thing had happened since we last met, he said. The family had moved house from "an evil area" to one which was much better. Alex explained that many people in the old neighbourhood were inter-related and that this frequently led to trouble. Often, someone would approach Alex and accuse him of "bashing up" a relative. Sometimes the relative would appear and confirm the fictitious beating which served as an excuse to beat Alex. Essentially,
beatings were very much part of Alex's life. He had been beaten in the neighbourhood, he was often walloped at home and he was "kicked about" in school. Indeed, being kicked about was one of the contributing reasons for Alex's truancy. He explained it in the following way:

A. I'm used to it in school and you learn just to laugh but I was getting too much of it outside school and I ran out of laughs. If they see they're getting at you they do it more, so I stopped coming.

Alex gave another reason why he had chosen to truant:

A. Some of the teachers were giving me a hard time. They wouldn't let me out to go to the toilet because some people write on the walls and smoke in there. They know I don't do that but they still wouldn't let me go - they said it wouldn't be fair to make exceptions. One day I wet myself. It was really embarrassing - you don't expect to do that at my age. They laughed at me. I just walked out and went home - I was crying and that made things even worse.

The day I attended lessons with Alex, I met his mother who had come to the school to talk to the PTG about Alex's truancy and about the fact that his epilepsy was becoming worse. He introduced me to his mother, explaining with pride that he had "got to help Sheila with her project".

Many more pupils referred to me by my first name than in School A where only one pupil (David) did so with any regularity.

Also in category (i) I chose to attend lessons with Betty (described in Appendices 51 and 62) who was living at home again after having been in care for most of the previous two terms. The PTG said that she had "mixed feelings" about Betty's return to the family home. The parents, she added,
were "not uncaring" but rather they were "very child-like" and actually needed to be looked after themselves. It appeared that Betty, being the oldest child, fulfilled the role of 'mother' to the parents and the five siblings. The PTG said that Betty's attendance was now much more regular but since returning home she was less clean and seemed to have lost much of the verve she had acquired whilst in care. Furthermore, perhaps because Betty's childhood had been curtailed in the pursuance of her domestic duties, she related better to adults and experienced many difficulties with her peers.

Sally (described in Appendices 67 and 68), whom I placed in category (ii), stressed but coping well, agreed to my request to attend lessons with her. She was a shy girl but able to put her thoughts into words in an interesting way. She was still experiencing problems at home because her twin brother was exempt from all domestic chores on the grounds that he was a boy, whilst Sally and her mother had to tidy up after him and her father. The stress at home, she said, was "giving me stress in school". She agreed to my accompanying her for the day because she hoped to be able to observe her own behaviour:

Sa. I'll be able to see what I'm doing and maybe I'll be able to see what I can do to cope better.

Hsueh Mei I also placed in category (ii) and would have described her as coping not only well but extremely well. Indeed, from talking and listening to her I considered that
she coped considerably better than the majority of her peers.

Hsueh Mei was the youngest of four Chinese sisters and all lived with their parents who were in the restaurant business. She was one of very few pupils who mentioned older siblings' academic success as well as her own academic ambitions. She explained that she would have preferred to have gone to one of the many private schools in Edinburgh where she would have been able to get on with her work without the constant interruptions of her peers. However, she said in a most accepting way:

H.M. This school was good enough for my sisters so it'll just have to be good enough for me.

Her middle two sisters were at college whilst the oldest was an accountant. Hsueh Mei was lucky, she said, having three older sisters who could assist her with her homework and who were "good friends" to her and helped her with "growing up":

H.M. Whatever age I am my sisters know what it's like because they've been that age and know the problems and can give me advice when I ask for it. And because they went to this school they know what it's like here.

Hsueh Mei reminded me of many of the pupils in School A in that she was very comfortable with adults and able to be friendly without being familiar. Unlike several of her peers she was able to initiate a conversation and to avoid statements and questions which were personal and bordered (unknown to them, I am sure) on the insolent. She explained that she was accustomed to being in the company of adults.
and that older people were respected in her culture. She said that she enjoyed being part of the large Chinese community that existed in Edinburgh and often attended gatherings where children and adults mixed freely together. Her parents, she said, worked in the restaurant most evenings whilst her oldest sister was in charge of the other three. Hsueh Mei said that she and her sisters all got on well together and none of them resented being told what to do by the eldest. If there was trouble between them, she added, her parents would be upset which would not be fair because they had to work in the evenings to support the family.

Details of attending lessons, along with some observations in the corridors, can be found in Appendix 69.

6.8.3 **Pupils' Reactions to my Presence in Class**

Generally speaking the pupils were less inhibited, yet more socially unsure of themselves, than those in School A. When I was in the classroom no pupil in School A, who did not know me, asked me directly why I was attending lessons. Although in the present school I was ignored in the majority of classes, several pupils either asked me why I was present or said in a voice loud enough for me to hear "Who's she? What does she want?" When I was asked directly, I replied but frequently the enquirer did not seem to know how to respond to the answer. He (it was usually a boy who asked) would then often involve a peer with some derogatory remark.
For example, when I explained briefly to a boy named Jim that I was doing a project on stress and coping he replied:

J. You should speak to Michael he has stress - he's so thick he gets everything wrong. Don't you Michael? (said with a laugh).

Michael and Jim then began a slanging match, each trying to outdo the other with his negative remarks.

I found that this sort of pattern of behaviour was not unusual and I had to be very careful with whom I started a conversation. On occasions, I would be speaking with a member of the class who seemed happy to talk to me and along would come a third party who would begin slagging the person with whom I was talking. The interloper always looked at my respondent but directed the remarks at me. For example, Andy (a stranger to me) interrupted a conversation I was having with Annabel:

A. You shouldn't listen to her, she'll tell you a load of rubbish (said with a laugh).

Very soon I began to understand why so many pupils did not want me to attend lessons with them. Remarks such as those described above were commonplace. Indeed, they appeared to be a way of life in many of the classes I attended.

Frequently as I walked around the class or sat observing the pupils' transactions with each other I overheard the negative and sometimes cruel jibes they made at each other. It seemed to be almost second nature for some pupils to make such remarks. Often the offender did not even wait for a response before moving on to someone else. Perhaps because
the class was so rarely silent the teachers seemed to be unaware of the comments. Perhaps they did hear them but considered them to be unimportant. After all, the person making the remark was usually laughing. Certainly I had been told by several pupils that it was "dangerous" to answer in class because of the "wisecracks" and that they "did not hear what the teacher was saying for waiting to be slagged". Furthermore, I had been told that "you don't know what it's like in some classes" (and undoubtedly the 'wisecracks' flew faster and more furiously in some lessons than in others). I had heard these and similar comments but, until I witnessed the transactions for myself, I had totally failed to grasp the importance of them. At one level the comments might have been seen as harmless fun but at another level they were extremely pervasive and insidious. It certainly did appear that anyone who was the focus of attention in some way was open to ridicule. Life in class was, indeed, most difficult for many pupils because of the constant barrage of negative remarks which, clearly, had the effect of undermining their confidence. Certainly many pupils, who were prepared to speak to me on their own or with chosen friends, did not want to engage in any transaction with me in class. The number of these pupils was much greater than in School A.

I had observed that several pupils in School A did not want to speak to me in class, perhaps out of embarrassment or perhaps because they feared their peers' reactions. However, no pupils in that school openly tried to belittle
another or behaved in the ways described above, within my earshot. There, it was relatively easy to talk to one of a group of three or four without feeling that the others were ready to slag the respondent. Indeed, the others frequently joined in the conversation. Perhaps because more pupils in School A were actively engaged in their work (than were the pupils in the present school) they were able to talk about it in a more confident way and to allow others to do the same.

I must emphasise that the above observations were generalisations and there were several pupils in the present school who were more able, than some in School A, to talk about the work in which they were involved. No pupils in the present school (unlike several in School A) complained about my choice of person with whom to attend lessons. This might have been attributable to the lack of academic competition among pupils in the present school as well as their predilection for put-down remarks.

6.8.4 Teachers' Reactions to my Presence in Class

Teachers' reactions were generally similar to those in School A. Although I had spoken to many of them during my time in the school most seemed to be a little anxious about having me present in their classrooms and some were apologising for the poor quality of their lesson before they had even begun. Those teachers who had already taught in a Community school (other than this one) were decidedly more
at ease.

The letter T. in this section indicates that a teacher (any teacher) is speaking. It should be made clear that my conversations with staff were not tape recorded. I did make detailed notes of what had been said as soon as possible afterwards but cannot guarantee that the teachers' comments are verbatim.

As in School A the majority of teachers made me welcome in their classes and although some were reticent at the beginning most warmed up after I made a point of speaking to them. (In School A I had learned the importance of making time to speak to the teacher whose lesson I was attending). Only one teacher (whom I had not previously met) chose not to speak to me and I observed that she was also very aloof and kept her distance (physically) from the class she was teaching. There was one lesson (on Sally's timetable) that I was not allowed to attend. The PTG said that it was "just too stressful for me even to ask" the teacher concerned. I had never spoken to the teacher in question although I had heard of him from Christine (see Appendix 53) and others and Sally sympathised with the PTG when she explained:

Sa. She couldn't ask him. He's got awful stress himself and can't really cope with us without going mad. He'd really go up the wall if you were there. He tries to make jokes one day and shouts at you the next. He's very unfair but I don't think he can help it - he's not right.

As happened in School A, the majority of teachers apologised for not teaching a "more interesting lesson". Many said
they were sorry it was "so boring" but I had come at a bad time (just after the examinations). Some said they would soon be starting new work which would be so much more interesting. Another apologised because he had just begun a new project and was "in a bit of a guuddle" and yet another regretted that the lesson I had just seen was "not typical".

I had already been informed by several teachers, including the Headteacher, that staff were divided in their opinions about how the school should be run. One teacher was of the opinion that:

T. The staff don't pull together. They're very intolerant of each other and always putting each other down.

She attributed this to the fact that there were several staff who shared the Headteacher's philosophy whilst others favoured a more traditional approach. Interestingly, although I heard several teachers argue against the Headteacher's views on schooling I heard no one criticise the Headteacher. Some saw the regime as being too lax, others described it as being too rigid and formal. One teacher described the school as being "too structured and too exam oriented". Another said:

T. Attendance and punctuality are very bad. Pupils often don't bother to come in for the first lesson. Sometimes they (senior management) have a crack down and it gets better for a while but it doesn't last. You never get a full class on a Monday morning. How can you get through the syllabus? These kids don't know how to behave in an exam. 40 minutes is as long as some of the fourth years have ever done. It's not fair on them. But there seems to be the attitude that you mustn't put any pressure on them.
A relatively new Guidance teacher who had come from another Community school said that, in the present school, there was much too strong an emphasis on discipline as opposed to guidance and that pupils were being sent to the deputy Headteacher in charge of discipline, when they should be sent to him. He added:

T. Some teachers don't even try to understand the kids - they just want to punish them. Well, that's not going to work because it's all some of them get at home. Somebody needs to try and help them but that takes time and nobody's got that, it seems.

All the Guidance staff shared the Headteacher's views on schooling and several had come to the present school, having taught with her in her previous Community school.

One teacher, who said that she had been at the school for nine years and enjoyed teaching there, made the following observations:

T. We're lucky because we've got a good teacher/pupil ratio and classes are usually no more than 20. Some I've got have only 15 and they never all come in.

After a pause she added, with a laugh:

T. Just imagine if there were 30 of them like this. It doesn't bear thinking about!

Another teacher, on giving back examination results, said that only one boy in the whole class had passed. He added that the practical work done in class was quite good but that no learning was being done and homework was rarely completed. He went on:
T. It's quite depressing. I think that I work quite hard but I get so little in return. It must be depressing for the kids to keep failing exams but what do you do - lower the standards so that more pass or scrap exams altogether? I suppose that you just plod on and lower your own expectations.

A very friendly, out-going teacher, who made the prospect of my presence in his class sound like the best thing that could have happened to him, explained that he was leaving that day to start a job outside teaching. He added that he would be taking a drop of £4000 in his annual salary but that he had "had enough of teaching". He said that he had been acting Head of Department since the beginning of the year and had previously taught in another Community school. However, he was very "disappointed" in this school which he said was "dangerously divided". He continued:

T. The kids are super; the Head's super. I knew her before and that's why I came here but I wouldn't stay. I could have had the Head of Department's job. Some of the teachers are so out of touch with the kids - they don't know what makes them tick and they don't want to know. They just want to go back to when they were at school and have everybody sitting in silence in rigid, straight lines. I left that behind years ago and there's no way I'm going back. Something's got to happen - either they run it as a real community school or else they decide it's to be an old fashioned, traditional school - but, as far as I'm concerned, this isn't working.

The pupils were described by various staff as being "very good and friendly"; "very rude"; "too repressed"; "always high"; "don't know where to draw the line"; "hard working"; "lacking in concentration"; "great to teach"; "lazy"; "appreciative of what you do for them".

Many more teachers, than in School A, seemed to be
discontented because the system was too demanding of the pupils or not demanding enough or because of the poor facilities and lack of resources or because of lack of positive communication between staff. Several teachers used the lesson I attended to give voice to their own particular concerns. I was surprised at how many were willing to talk to me (a total stranger to some) about what annoyed or upset them. As with School A I did not mention (unless specifically asked) that I was a teacher. Very few (once I was in the classroom) showed much interest in me and my research, preferring to tell me about themselves. One particular teacher, whom I had met but did not really know, said:

T. You have to be very careful who you say what to because it can be taken the wrong way.

She then seemed to forget her own warning as she launched into an attack on the Government, the education authority and her own Head of department. As with many of the pupils I spoke with in the Individual Conversations, some members of staff became increasingly angry as they spoke. Several teachers, once they started talking to me, ignored the class altogether in their eagerness to spill out whatever was on their mind. One particular class became noisier and noisier as the teacher spoke to me and I began to feel quite concerned about the racket. The teacher, however, simply said, in a very angry tone of voice, "just listen to them" as if to illustrate the point she was making about their poor concentration and continued talking to me.
One particular teacher, who was new to the school, said it was a relief to talk to me (an outsider) as she had not dared confide in another member of staff as she had "not sussed them out yet". She explained her dilemma in the following way:

T. When I first came here I was horrified at how lacking in motivation the classes were. This is a caring school - whatever that means - and there is a feeling that the kids shouldn't be pushed but some of them do nothing absolutely nothing. They're nice kids but can be quite rude because they're so open. I don't think many of them are very bright and the few that are can't sustain their interest long enough to do very much.

The teacher went on to say that she had previously taught in a school in Perth:

T. The school was ruled with a rod of iron by a Head of the 'old school'. The staff and kids were terrified of him. The emphasis was on passing exams but at least everyone knew where they stood. I don't really know what I should be doing with these kids. I can't get any work out of them and I feel guilty but I don't really get the impression that anyone else is doing much better. It's not very satisfying, though.

Another new, part-time teacher was glad to talk to someone about her worries:

T. Being part-time, I don't really get to know the staff. I only know the ones in my department and they're a funny lot. They don't tell me anything and they don't want to give me anything. I don't know what resources there are and when I ask I don't really get an answer. When I asked for chalk I got one stick! I didn't like to push for any more. I don't know what to do. The Head of Department makes me feel like one of the kids. I just come in and do my job and go home again - but I feel isolated.

Not all members of staff, however, spent their time complaining. One teacher of Technological Studies was
especially positive and pleased with the work his pupils produced. He spoke at length about the efforts of some former pupils but despite a lengthy rummage in a cupboard he failed to find the examples of the work he was describing. When I returned the following morning to a class taught by this same teacher, he greeted me like an old friend and, abandoning the class to take me to the room in which we had spoken the previous day, he said:

T. I hoped you'd come back. Remember I was telling you about that class I had last year? I've looked out some of the things they did, for you to look at.

I was then invited to examine some models (about which I understood little) that had been made by a group of pupils who had since left school.

A Woodwork teacher also spoke with great enthusiasm about the work his classes had done and insisted on taking me (at such a speed that I had to run to keep up with him) to some lock-up garages in the playground where I was invited to admire the furniture and toys that his senior pupils had made. I knew nothing whatsoever about his subject but duly complied with his wishes and contorted myself in an attempt to appreciate the work from a variety of angles.

These last two teachers were more typical of those in School A. They wanted to share their successes with me and, I suspected, to seek my approval that what they were doing was right. Several other teachers also seemed to need affirmation as they explained, in detail, their aims and
objectives for the various classes. Generally speaking, the teachers of practical subjects appeared to be more satisfied than those whose lessons were mainly theoretical.

Many members of staff were so caught up in their particular concern that teaching was not their main priority. For example, one teacher told me several times that the advisers had given the school 20 electronic typewriters but that they could not be used as there was no money for ribbons. Another complained at length about how TVEI had paid for a number of computers but that there was no money to buy the software to run them. I formed the impression that there was a great deal of unresolved anger among many of the staff at the politics of the school and the education authority and that this could have only an adverse effect on their actual teaching. Perhaps, just as many pupils (mainly because of domestic problems) were in no state to learn, so some teachers (mainly because of school based problems) were not in a particularly good state to teach, as judged by the amount of time they spent talking about their various other worries.

6.8.5 Some Teachers' Thoughts on Pupils' Perceptions of Stress

As with School A I did not specifically ask staff what they thought pupils might find stressful but several, in the course of a conversation, put forward their suggestions. I did not question what I was told, nor did I probe for further details. Instead, I simply accepted whatever staff
chose to say.

Several teachers thought that the pupils must have found it stressful being pushed by certain members of staff who were more interested in "getting the kids through exams than in the kids themselves". Some others considered that it was probably stressful not being stretched at all. One teacher suggested that:

T. Nothing's asked of them. The school's turning out a bunch of namby-pambies. It's tough out there in the real world and the sooner they learn that the better.

Yet other teachers said that it must be stressful trying to accommodate the many different standards and approaches of the staff. Interestingly, no pupils made any of the above points. Perhaps the staff who made these comments were simply stating issues that they found stressful in the school. As with School A, teachers' perceptions of what pupils found stressful were mainly concerned with academic issues which, in fact, were given very low priority by the pupils.

6.8.6 Findings from Attending Lessons

Generally speaking, the pupils were decidedly less work-orientated than those in School A. During my week of attending lessons I saw very little evidence on the pupils' part of sustained engagement with their work. Concentration spans seemed to be very short. At best, they worked for brief spells before breaking off to engage in social
transactions with their peers. Some resumed work after a while but others did not. Several worked quite diligently in some lessons but did little in others. A few appeared to do practically nothing all week. Many appeared to have no equipment and, often, when I enquired why people were doing nothing they said that they had left whatever they needed at home. Indeed, one teacher said that it was difficult giving homework because "anything that goes home never comes back".

In one class of 14 pupils only two (one of whom was the pupil I was with) had the requisite folder. The teacher then had to adapt his lesson to accommodate the other 12. He explained that it was almost impossible to make any meaningful progress because the pupils were not able, or prepared, to take their share of responsibility for their own learning. He added with a sort of hopelessness:

T. The teacher can only do so much but they (the pupils) expect you to do everything. They don't seem to think it's got anything to do with them. They're good kids but they don't have much idea.

The above observations were generalisations and I should point out that there were individuals (for example Hsueh Mei, Gavin, Bruce and Zaki) who applied themselves with interest and diligence in almost all classes. These individuals, however, were exceptions and all the more to be marvelled at for continuing to work amid the general hubbub that surrounded them.

Many more pupils than in School A described their lessons as being "boring" but when I asked the reason I was usually
told that it "just is". Perhaps the work was boring because, unlike School A, few pupils actually became involved with it other than at a very superficial level and most were very easily distracted. In practical subjects in particular, pupils often left the room. Perhaps they went off in search of equipment which was stored elsewhere. Most returned but some did not and this might have explained why I saw so many pupils in the corridors during lessons; they had left the classroom simply for a walk about.

In one class I spoke with a group of three girls who wore Indian dress and who appeared to be working harder than most. One of them said that she would be a housewife when she left school, another that she would work in her parents' shop until she got married and the third said that her parents had already arranged her marriage. None of them was very interested in lessons. They said that they would have preferred to attend an all girls school. They had chosen to come to the present school because of the high number of black people who attended. Educational success, they said, was not important for girls. Another girl said that the only things she liked about school were "break and dinner". Another said, "I can't wait to leave" and, with pride, showed me her engagement ring. Much of the girls' time was spent applying, what appeared to be, communal make-up. Sometimes in the course of one lesson layer upon layer was put on and the girls jostled with each other for a view of themselves in the one heavily stained mirror. On one occasion, perhaps because I was staring in fascination, the
make-up was even passed to me with the words "want some?". Nails were painted one lesson and the varnish picked off the next. A considerable amount of food and drink was consumed and frequently I heard the 'sizzling' of a personal stereo. For the most part the teachers were too busy trying to teach and seeing to the needs of the various groups and individuals to observe much of the above conduct.

Generally speaking, the behaviour could not be described as being bad; it was just that the pupils did not do very much in the way of school work. I did not witness any really disruptive behaviour and the teachers were able to get the classes to listen for a few minutes. After that they tended to become restless and the teachers (although they often had not finished their explanation) usually set the class a task which was performed with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Sometimes individuals were called to order but I did not witness any confrontation between a pupil and teacher during the entire week.

As in School A the 'men' tended to sit at the back of the class, swinging on the back legs of their chairs, exchanging smart remarks. Broadly speaking, these boys were much more socially gauche than their equivalents in School A and I tended to speak to them less than I would have liked. Sometimes when I approached such a group, one or two boys began laughing louder than was natural and soon all of them joined in. I did not think that they were laughing at me; in fact, (as with the 'men' in School A) I did not think
that they were laughing at anything. It appeared simply to be a way of coping with what might have been a stressful situation. Clearly, these boys did not want to speak to me when they were all together and there was no one among them like Euan, in School A, to set a lead for the others to follow. On their own, however, several sought me out to tell me something and all appeared to be much more comfortable and relaxed when not surrounded by the group.

In only one class was the group expected to be silent throughout the 40 minutes session. This lesson was part of the English course and involved the pupils in "private reading". The teacher walked about the room like a prison warder, pouncing on anyone who dared to say anything. At one point the boy (a stranger to me) with whom I shared a table tried to speak to me and before I could even think of an answer the teacher was berating him at length. The atmosphere became increasingly tense and oppressive and the pupils increasingly restless. I felt decidedly uncomfortable. Very little reading appeared to be done. Towards the end of the lesson, the teacher had to leave the room and the class erupted. There was more noise and excitement in the few minutes she was gone than I had heard in any class throughout the week. Those around me gave a sigh of relief, closed their books and said that they were not interested in reading. The boy at my table, whose name I learned was Calum, said to me:

C. She's not usually as bad as this - maybe it's all for your benefit. We've told her we don't want to read these stupid books.
Kirsty (described in Appendix 63) also shared the table with Calum and myself. Her mother was living with the father of another girl in third year and whenever I saw Kirsty she was either spoiling for a fight or else she was in tears because she had just had one. This particular day she was in tears and sobbed silently until the teacher left the room whereupon she, noisily, burst into tears before being comforted by her friends.

Appendix 70 contains accounts of my days with Betty, Sally, Alex and Hsueh Mei as well as information on some third year pupils. In Appendix 71 I describe my visit to the alternative education centre.

6.8.7 Summary of Phase Four

This phase of the study took place from Monday to Thursday during the third week of the Summer term of the pupils' third year. During this time I attended a variety of lessons with a cross-section of the staff. The selection of pupils proved to be difficult. Many were unwilling to accommodate me because they feared (with justification I discovered) the adverse reactions of their peers. As a result of attending lessons I learned just how divided the staff were in their opinions of how the school should be organised. This, in turn, had an effect on their perceptions of the pupils as learners.

From talking with the pupils whom I accompanied, it appeared
that little that was stressful actually happened during our
day together. However, Sally and Betty worked hard to
protect themselves from any possible stressors and this,
according to Sally, was itself stressful. Indeed, my
presence, for those two, proved to be more stressful than
anything else that took place. Because I was a familiar
figure around the school and in social education lessons I
had failed to recognise that I was not a regular presence in
other classes. Although I knew so many pupils and teachers
and considered myself part of the school this was
insufficient to allow me to witness everyday classroom
transactions. The decision to hold the de-briefing session
the following day proved satisfactory and the pupils were
better able than those in School A to take a 'bird's eye
view' of the day's events. However, I was unable to discuss
the everyday, stressful classroom situations as I had
anticipated because my presence had so altered the context.
It would have been better had I conducted Phase Four during
the pupils' second year. The pupils were then together for
all lessons and I could more easily have accompanied them to
a wider selection of classes and so become part of the
classroom setting.
CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
7.1 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

7.1.1 Introduction

At the outset of this study a series of questions formed the basis of the research investigation. These broad, open-ended questions were starting points from which I was able to explore the pupils' perceptions of stress and coping. Resulting from the pupils' responses during the Group and Individual Conversations, I was able to formulate further questions which were personally relevant to the group or the individual. Despite the wide scope of idiosyncratic responses which this approach encouraged, there emerged, across all three schools, a pattern of stress and a range of coping strategies which were very similar. These common themes, which form the overall findings from the study, are examined in the course of this chapter and the emerging issues are discussed. It is appreciated that the stress experienced by the pupils and the ways in which they coped are inextricably linked. However, in the interests of clarity sources of stress and coping strategies are discussed in separate sections. The role of the school, in exacerbating or ameliorating pupils' stressors is interwoven, where appropriate, throughout the chapter.

7.1.2 Some Preconceptions Reconsidered

Before beginning the fieldwork I realised that, during the conversations, pupils might, occasionally, introduce stressors experienced outside school and I decided to accept
this only insofar as it allowed them to describe the effects the stressors had on their coping strategies in school. When I conducted the Pilot Study, however, I discovered that I had grossly underestimated the number of occasions on which stress outside school, and especially in the home, would be mentioned. On listening to the tape recordings of the conversations I found, much to my amazement because I was not aware of it at the time, that, in my single-minded attempt to persuade the pupils to talk about stress and coping in school, I frequently prevented them from enlarging on their tales of home stressors. I behaved as if the pupils' lives were compartmentalised and tended to brush aside their offerings about home because I did not fully appreciate, at the time, the extent to which they were related to stress in school. Broadly speaking, the amount of stress experienced by pupils in school was directly related to the amount of stress they were experiencing out of school and, especially, in the home. It really was impossible to separate school from home. My stance towards the pupils, taken as a former teacher, might not have surprised Salmon and Claire (1984) who argued that the separation of school knowledge from out-of-school experience and the exclusion from classroom concerns of personal feelings and personal relationships, although disputed by many teachers, is deeply entrenched in secondary school practice. Certainly, in the Pilot Study I was rather blinkered in my approach and worked hard at trying to persuade the pupils to concentrate only on school and the events therein, to the virtual exclusion of all else in
their lives. Many pupils were trying to share vital details with me but I was not 'hearing' them because I considered them to be irrelevant to the research.

Related to my inability to 'hear' was my surprise at the high number of pupils who kept returning to, and simply repeating, stories they had already told me. In my enthusiasm to elicit as many stressors as possible I did not encourage this sort of re-iteration. Perhaps in my selfish naivety I expected the pupils to supply me with a list of stressors (preferably a long list) and to describe, in their own words, how they coped with them. With hindsight, the only way in which my initial, practical approach (but not my theoretical approach) differed from conventional research was that I allowed (with certain constraints) the pupils to supply their own stressors and coping strategies as opposed to asking them to respond to my suggestions. Essentially, I was unprepared for what happened in the Pilot Study because I had altogether underestimated the personal implications for the pupils of what I was asking and, therefore, failed to comprehend, at a most vital level, the personal importance of what the pupils were telling me. These pupils were not merely giving me information; they were also opening up (frequently for the first time) and showing me extremely precious parts (often fragile and raw parts) of themselves. This was, indeed, a salutary lesson in the difference between theoretical and practical knowledge. I knew, at a theoretical level, that I wanted to hear personal examples of stressors but had failed to take into account,
at a practical level, the pain, shame and anger these stressors could evoke in the pupils. It came as a shock to have to admit that I had been much less open-minded than I had realised and that I, clearly, expected responses which I was not being given. Furthermore, this happened despite the fact that I prided myself on being open to whatever the pupils had to tell me and had emphasised the necessity of undertaking the study naturalistically. I had very much expected the pupils to be more concerned about school, itself, than they were and it was, indeed, to my advantage that the research questions allowed a very wide range of response. That the same themes and patterns of stress kept emerging became clear to me only when I analysed the data at the end of the Pilot Study.

It was at that time, also, that I began to appreciate the full impact that stress at home had on pupils' functioning in school. This was just one of several lessons I was to learn in the course of the fieldwork about the vast difference between conceptual knowledge and lived understanding. Being a relatively experienced teacher I 'knew' that disharmony in the home could have deleterious effects on a pupil's performance in school and, indeed, had dealt with many pupils experiencing such familial unrest. However, from listening to the stories (some of which were extremely harrowing) of pupils in all three schools I came to 'know' in an altogether different way what the pupils were telling me. Because of my role as researcher, I could allow myself to enter the pupils' worlds and to resonate
with the pleasures and pains they chose to share with me in a way which I did not, and perhaps could not, as a practising teacher. This rude awakening forced me to examine not only my role as a teacher but the teaching role itself.

7.1.3 Communication between Teachers and between Teachers and Pupils

In defence of my 'deafness' when teaching, I would argue that the teaching role demands so much that it is difficult, and even impossible at times, to find the emotional space necessary to be truly open to our pupils. The physical and emotional energy needed to fulfil the myriad duties required of a teacher frequently means that relationships with colleagues and pupils are very low on a teacher's list of priorities. Teachers in all three schools described the professional pressures they were under and regretted that there seemed to be less and less time to socialise even with those in the same department, never mind with staff from other departments. Several teachers said that they increasingly felt as if they were operating "within a vacuum"; that they were doing their best but were never quite sure whether it was "right". With recent educational innovations many reported that they were less confident about their performance and spoke of the need for guidance and reassurance. This, most realised, was easier said than done because those in positions to offer support were equally insecure, under pressure and in need of affirmation. As one teacher commented:
It's the blind leading the blind. You've just got to rely on your own instincts much of the time.

Teachers' need for affirmation was clearly demonstrated during Phase Four of the study. The aims for this phase had been explained to staff when their permission was sought for me to attend lessons. However, despite teachers' knowing that the pupils were my focus of attention during this phase, very many used my presence in their classroom as an occasion to discuss their own work, to talk through their syllabus, to justify their actions, to express their grievances and to seek my reassurance and approval. Some of these staff had not spoken to me before Phase Four and several appeared not to need (or even want) me to contribute to any conversation we had. As with so many pupils, these teachers simply wanted to talk. Initially, I was rather surprised at the teachers' wish to communicate with me (a stranger to many), especially as so few knew that I had any connection with teaching and, therefore, any understanding of what they were telling me. I was not surprised, however, at the change which took place in some teachers when I spoke with them in the company of other staff. There was, in fact, a parallel between these behaviours of teachers and those of pupils in the Individual and Group Conversations.

A teacher's classroom is very much an 'inner sanctum': a place of privacy which most teachers guard jealously. A teacher's performance in the classroom is seldom witnessed by other adults and, perhaps because of this, many staff (myself included) can feel threatened by the mere presence of another adult during a lesson. It was clear from talking
with staff during Phase Four that there was an unspoken but accepted code of confidentiality in the safety and privacy of the classroom and that whatever personal details and private opinions teachers chose to share with me would go no further. Before commencing Phase Four I felt privileged to be allowed access to classrooms where I could witness the various transactions and recognised that I had a delicate role to play. However, I was unprepared for the role of 'Confessor' which I was asked to perform. As with so many pupils, I considered that several staff were sharing information for the first time and I felt both humbled and concerned at the obvious need of so many teachers to communicate not only their insecurities, worries and grievances but also to share their successes. Clearly, if such a sounding board were available in schools I would not have been used as such by so many teachers. This need was more apparent in School B than in School A where the staff appeared to be more united and positive in their approach to teaching. Certainly, I encountered considerably fewer complaints from the teachers in School A during Phase Four. Instead, they tended to look to me for reassurance and tips about improving their lessons and teaching performance. Staff in School B, on the other hand, did not share a common approach and, indeed, many held underlying views about teaching and pupils which were in total contrast with those of their colleagues. These differences served to divide and isolate teachers who felt misunderstood, angry, impotent and insecure. People in this position are in no state to support others, as was demonstrated by the comments of
several new and part-time staff who were not receiving the essential direction and guidance needed to be of maximum help to their pupils. Such findings surely indicate an urgent need for the implementation of a carefully structured, sensitive appraisal mechanism to provide our teachers with the support and affirmation which they so desperately require and deserve.

Concern was expressed by some teachers about the ever-increasing number of pupils in need of pastoral care which often meant that, in the time available, only extreme cases were dealt with. Not all teachers, of course, have any desire for personal communion with their pupils, as demonstrated by several members of staff in all three schools. These teachers said that, although they enjoyed teaching and liked the pupils, it was not their responsibility (and some were most adamant about this) to deal with pupils' personal problems about which they could do little or nothing. As one teacher remarked:

T. I trained to teach Science not to be a Social Worker. Too much is expected of teachers and I'm just not equipped to deal with these kids' problems. I know that some of them have terrible lives but what can I do about it? As long as they don't disturb the others I'm quite happy.

Some teachers added that everyone had personal problems, that they had no place in school and suggested a "stiff upper lip" or a "brave face" was necessary. I sensed anger behind some such comments and, clearly, several teachers did not want to discuss this topic further, judging by their
tone of voice and non-verbal communication. Some other
teachers, in the course of conversations, mentioned problems
with their own children and partners and occasionally added
that teaching, which took all their concentration whilst in
school, helped to keep them "sane". Perhaps, for some of
these members of staff, the burden of their own problems was
so heavy that they could not risk adding to it by opening
themselves to the pain of their pupils. These teachers
coped in school by making a determined effort to concentrate
on the teaching of their subject (as opposed to the teaching
of their pupils) which enabled them to forget their own
stressors for a while and by closing themselves off from
other people's problems. They tried, with varying success,
to compartmentalise their lives and, clearly, wanted others
to do the same. In any case, in Scottish schools, the
Teaching Unions insist (although changes are underway) that
pastoral care is 'not part of the group tutors' brief (never
mind that of the ordinary classroom teacher) but is the
responsibility of the Guidance staff.

Communication, of course, is a two-way process and desirous
as teachers might be to connect with their pupils, the
pupils themselves tend to be wary. As demonstrated so
elocutiously by those young people with whom I spoke, pupils
are not prepared to open their hearts to teachers.
Essentially, the majority agreed that they could not
'afford' to confide in staff. This, combined with the fact
that many teachers cannot 'afford' to listen can only mean
that pupils and staff frequently bypass each other. Indeed,
sociality is ill-served in many schools which are organised in such a way that both pupils and teachers are seen, not as unique individuals but, in stereotyped roles. It can hardly be surprising, therefore, that mutual understanding between pupils and staff is, frequently, severely limited and distorted. As Salmon and Claire (1984) demonstrated, effective classroom communication is dependent upon mutual understanding. Where this is lacking, according to Torode (1977), teachers' messages are not received as intended nor, as Driver (1982) described, are pupils' messages understood by teachers. This lack of understanding between the two parties was at the root of so many stressors mentioned by pupils. An explanation for this absence of sociality was posited by Kelly (1963, p.90):

...it is possible for two people to be involved in the same real events but, because they construe them differently, to experience them differently. Since they construe them differently, they will anticipate them differently and will behave differently as a consequence of their anticipations.

This lack of sociality between pupils and teachers is further hampered by the fact that many pupils reported finding it difficult, even to attempt, to explain their motives and actions because doing so served to confirm teachers' opinions that pupils were being 'difficult'. Additionally, the imbalance of power between teachers and pupils does little to encourage the development of sociality.

7.1.4 Power Relations in School
Despite the fact (or perhaps because of it) that I was a relative stranger in the schools, I judged, from my position as a former teacher, that most pupils were much more open and trusting in their attitude towards me than if I had been one of their teachers. From our first meeting, I had emphasised to the pupils that I had no connection with the school; in other words, I had no power in the school and therefore, no power over them. Additionally, I had stressed that I was reliant on the pupils' help; that the research could be carried out only with their co-operation. By dint of the fact that only they knew the answers, they wielded a power which is denied pupils in day-to-day transactions with staff. Indeed, pupils are given few real choices in school and have very little (that is acceptable to the school) in the way of bargaining power. It was not surprising, under these circumstances, to hear one pupil say that bad behaviour and even truanting were a "legitimate protest" against unsatisfactory treatment by staff. But, how many teachers are prepared to examine their role in their pupils' bad behaviour? Several pupils, although unclear what I wanted, presented themselves for the Group Conversations with the words, "We've come to help you" or "We're not sure what we have to do but we're the only ones who can do it". Although I had chosen to enlist the pupils' help I had, again, not understood the personal implications for the pupils and was surprised at how important some of them felt at being involved and how seriously most of them took their role. I was also impressed by the loyalty and sensitivity which the pupils (with the exception of the two girls in
section 5.4.3) displayed towards others. There appeared to be an unwritten code of practice which only these two girls violated. Some pupils, when talking about other people, asked if they were allowed to mention names. Others began their stories with such phrases as "Well, there's this girl (or boy) in my class". Staff were frequently referred to, not by name but, as "my English (or whatever subject) teacher".

As the pupils knew they had a major contribution to make, the balance of power, although still weighted in my favour because I was an adult (and an adult in school), was decidedly less unequal than that between teacher and pupil. Additionally and most importantly, because the pupils recognised my relative powerlessness, I did not consider that the majority of them expected me to do anything to alleviate the stressors they described. This was in total contrast with my role as teacher. Pupils expect their teachers to 'know the answer' and teachers, realising this, try to produce the 'right answer' (even when there isn't one). Therefore, when pupils give a teacher the sort of information they were giving me it is generally with the intention that the teacher produces some sort of solution. Faced (sometimes unwillingly) with a pupil's problem, the teacher is often in a quandary as to what to do and, at times, there is little the school can do. Under these circumstances it is, perhaps, not surprising that many teachers try to distance themselves from their pupils' problems. Many of the pupils with whom I spoke, recognising
that staff were in no position to ameliorate their stressors, kept them to themselves and tolerated (or failed to tolerate) staff's nagging about falling standards of work or deteriorating behaviour. Sociality is, therefore, further diminished by the pupils' unwillingness to add to the teachers' power by giving them personal information which staff might use against them and by the fact that pupils prefer to suffer in silence rather than share problems to which the school can offer no solution.

Essentially, I consider that the role I fulfilled in the three schools was so very different from the teaching role that it could not be played by teachers, regardless of how well intentioned they might be. This is not the same as saying, of course, that the school has no role to play in supporting its pupils. All three schools had well set out Guidance policies and I was often asked my opinion about specific pupils as well as being given information about particular individuals. Additionally, I formed the impression that anything I said to my liaison teachers would be taken seriously. School A, in particular, was impressively well organised with flow charts clearly delineating the routes to be followed for different situations. However, despite these beautifully presented, theoretical guidelines, the practical Guidance on offer to the pupils with whom I worked was, in my opinion, less than adequate. All, of the small number of pupils, who reported approaching the Senior House Counsellor for help (always out of sheer desperation, it transpired) had not even been
allowed to finish telling their stories. Instead, they all complained that they had been interrupted and disciplined; that they had even been blamed for the problem. Perhaps the Senior House Counsellor, like so many teachers, could not 'afford' to listen: did not want to hear what the pupils had to say. On the other hand, perhaps this particular teacher, of many years' experience (but not, I suspect, Kellyan experience), was so accustomed to interrupting the pupils, to 'knowing best', to keeping them in their (inferior) place that the habit was translated, unconsciously, to the Guidance role. It was only when parents contacted the school that their offsprings' problems were seriously addressed by this House Counsellor. The Guidance on offer to the pupils with whom I worked in School B was of quite a different quality. There, the Principal Teacher of Guidance knew her pupils very well and was, in turn, trusted and respected by them. However, despite great (and largely successful) efforts on the part of the school to close the gap between teachers and pupils, it was evident, in the course of the Individual Conversations, that pupils thought many times before confiding in any teacher.

Despite an general unwillingness to confide in staff, relationships between teachers and pupils were described as being good by the majority of pupils in all three schools and most teachers were considered to have the pupils' best interests at heart. However, what teachers and pupils considered to be 'best' was frequently very different. Each side spent a great deal of time and energy (which,
otherwise, might have been spent in teaching or learning) trying to obtain the results they desired and meaningful communication rarely resulted. Teachers who allowed pupils to progress at their own speed were few and far between and those (all in School B) who reported trying this approach admitted feeling guilty at the lack of work produced by their pupils. (During Phase Four several pupils with whom I spoke reported, with obvious satisfaction, that they had worked hard, yet, from my position as a teacher, I would have said that most did next to nothing). However, many pupils said that they preferred working at their own pace. To be allowed to confer with their classmates was also enjoyed by pupils but such behaviour was not encouraged by many teachers who saw it as subversive and time wasting. Boys, in particular, when pressurised to work harder often responded by doing even less. Some pupils, who described themselves as being academically ambitious, reported needing to be pushed by teachers. However, this group consisted, at the very most, of only one third of all the pupils with whom I spoke. This does indicate that, much of the time, teachers and pupils are involved in altogether different pursuits with quite different goals.

I certainly do not want to paint a picture of the staff in any of the schools as insensitive boors. The vast majority with whom I spoke were interested in my study and most keen to know what they could do to help their pupils. Of course, it would have been so much easier for them (and perhaps for me) had I been able to present them with a list of 'dos and
don'ts' to alleviate stress for pupils in school. However, the problem was so much more complex.

7.1.5 Sources of Stress

There was a marked similarity in the sources of stress experienced by the majority of pupils in all three schools. Although the individual stories were different the themes and patterns of stress remained surprisingly consistent and were focused, mainly, on defective relationships with peers and staff. The degrees of stress experienced varied between individuals to a much greater extent than did the sources of stress and were largely determined by what else was going on in the individual's life at the time. Broadly speaking, the pupils who described (and frequently played a very active role in perpetuating) the most negative relationships in school were already trapped in a web of destructive relationships at home. For several pupils school simply acted as a catalyst, triggering off the sorts of negative and destructive responses which were so much part of the home situation. Many had an uncanny knack of re-enacting in school (time and time again) the painful scenarios of the home. It was almost as if they stage-managed scenes in school that portrayed life at home, with peers and staff cast in the roles of siblings and parents. Essentially, these pupils were in no state to learn academic lessons. However, teachers have a syllabus to cover (as so many of these pupils appreciated) and others in the class to consider. Frequently these, already stressed pupils fell
further and further behind with their school work which served only to exacerbate their problems. For the more fortunate, the domestic turmoils were short-lived and these pupils were able to re-settle at school and apply themselves to the task of learning. At the far extreme, however, were those pupils who had become persistent truants because they were under severe social and academic pressure in school resulting from stressors originating in the home. Staff were frequently relieved (even if they felt a little guilty) when troublesome pupils chose to truant and, indeed, one teacher quipped that it was only truanting which made teaching possible. Other pupils, although not absenting themselves physically, absented themselves psychologically by withdrawing into themselves. As with the truants, this group presented few problems for the teacher. Because they tended to suffer in silence, they were generally ignored by staff and, more damagingly, by their peers which added to their problems. As Jackson and Bannister (1985, p.79) demonstrated:

For a child, a serious way of being problematic is to be so in relation to other children. In construct theory terms, this is likely to be accompanied by confusion about self and in construing others.

Many of these pupils, who were without friends, described how it felt to be on the fringe of all that went on in school and the effects that this had on the way in which they saw themselves. Almost inevitably, these pupils attributed all school problems to their having no friends. Essentially, these pupils did not understand why they were
friendless or what they could do to improve the situation. This lack of understanding rendered them impotent to deal with the stressor. What they did understand was the aching loneliness they felt and several described the psychological agony (frequently with accompanying physical symptoms of stomach ache and nausea) of even going to school. Five such pupils reported feeling so dreadful that they "wanted to die" but, because they did not act out in school, their problems were seldom addressed. Their peers and teachers either failed to 'see' such pupils or attributed their problems to their unwillingness, rather than their inability, to make friends. Often, efforts had been made by peers and staff to involve such pupils in school activities but their approaches were, somehow, inappropriate to the pupils in question. They tended to be discriminated against and dismissed by both pupils and teachers who, irritably, suggested that their isolation was of their own choosing.

In contrast with the pupils described above were those who spoke about the positive and constructive relationships they enjoyed at home. Generally speaking, these pupils were able to translate this nourishing experience to the school situation. Many such pupils, because they related well to adults in the family, enjoyed good relationships with staff. Some, however, were less able to understand and relate to their peers whom they described as immature and a nuisance in class. It was interesting to note that pupils in this category were more inclined to describe the stress associated with academic work than their peers from less
settled home backgrounds. School work was often a source of stress for those who were pressed by parents to do well academically, as it was for those from families where there was a tradition of academic success. These pupils were concerned, to varying degrees, about their own academic ability, their relationships with staff, especially insofar as they affected academic progress and the work relationships within the class. Although disaffected pupils also mentioned these problems their emphasis was more on the stress arising from the social, rather than the academic, aspects of these stressors. Pupils from settled homes with no tradition of academic success were seldom over-concerned with school work and often expressed satisfaction with their progress. Indeed, the concerns and goals of formal education were of minimal relevance to many of these pupils and school was valued primarily for the friends to be met there. From talking with the pupils it was apparent that rowing parents had little spare energy to deal with their children's progress and, therefore, pressure to do well in school was, generally, applied by the more settled, academically ambitious parents. The priority given to school work was dependent upon the relationships the pupil had with peers, staff and family. If the personal aspects of pupils' lives were in good order, they were able to concentrate on matters academic but where this was not the case, school work ceased to be of much interest or importance. Once again, from talking with pupils, it was made clear to me that many, because of defective personal relationships, were in no fit state to learn in class.
It must be emphasised that the home did not play a role in all stressors experienced by pupils in school. Many pupils described the advice given to them by members of the family on how to deal with a variety of stressors originating in school. Others, for many reasons, chose not to involve their families and either kept the stressor to themselves or shared it with a friend. However, a very clear pattern did emerge which showed that those pupils who were most stressed in school were also experiencing stress at home.

I, certainly, overestimated the number of occasions on which school work as a stressor would be mentioned by pupils and, from talking with staff, it was clear that they, too, considered it would rank highly with pupils as a source of stress. This, perhaps, is understandable; after all, as educationalists, our raison d'etre is to teach and we assume that our pupils share our priorities. However, it is evidently not that simple. For pupils, the state of their personal relationships, clearly, came first and school learning came a very poor second. However, when I mentioned this fact to staff I received most unhelpful responses. Essentially, the majority of staff did not agree with my interpretation and suggested, in various ways, that I was exaggerating the importance of relationships in the lives of their pupils. Some teachers just looked at me, apparently at a loss for words. Others, initially interested to learn what I had discovered, soon looked bored and disappointed at hearing, what I presumed they felt were, trivialities. Yet
other teachers, without further ado, proceeded to tell me, with great confidence, the 'real' stressors experienced by the pupils. Presumably they had not consulted the pupils about this but several staff undoubtedly considered that they knew more about the topic than either the pupils or I did. Work, or rather the pupils' unwillingness to apply themselves to it, and behaviour were these teachers' main concerns. Some waxed lyrical on these themes and I imagined their delivering a similar monologue to their classes. The majority of staff who took this approach had little or no interest in hearing what I had to say, tended to see the pupils in very black and white terms and had an answer for almost every problem faced by pupils. They managed, somehow, to make life sound amazingly easy. When I tried to talk to one such teacher about individual pupils he interrupted me, saying that he chose not to see the pupils as individuals but preferred to treat them as a group. He suggested, with a wry smile, that seeing the pupils as individuals "could present problems" and he was keen to avoid that. He added, before walking away, that my seeing the pupils individually gave me a "false picture" as it was only in the class situation that they showed their "true colours". I was forced to conclude that these over-simplifications were teachers' ways of coping but saw no way that they could ever lead to real communication between themselves and their pupils. Several staff were quite intransigent in their opinions and I was glad that I was not one of their pupils. Listening to these teachers (of whom there were several in all three schools) I was reminded of
my own pupils (when I was teaching) who said, "teachers don't really listen" and "teachers always think they know best". Teachers' 'not listening' and 'knowing best' can, however, be seen as coping strategies. There is a tendency for people to 'hear' those requests to which they are able to respond and to ignore those which they are unable to support. As many pupils' cries for help (which take a variety of forms) are beyond teachers' control, ignoring them and assuming an attitude of 'knowing best' can deflect doubt and enable teachers to cope by producing an illusion of control. Such behaviour, however, fails to address the pupils' problems and serves only to drive a wedge in the pupil/teacher relationship.

I had my own professional eyes and ears opened several times when talking with the pupils and I began to understand how pupils must feel when trying to communicate with staff who not only steadfastly refuse to 'see' and 'hear' but dare to contradict. To have it suggested that what I knew from listening to 120 pupils was exaggerated, trivial or wrong, I found depressing and frustrating. How much more frustrating and annoying must it be for the very pupils, who experienced the events, to try to communicate them to staff? It is hardly surprising that so many pupils preferred the shame of their ineffective coping to trying to share their problems with that sort of teacher.

It was interesting to learn that most staff in all three schools and many pupils in School B shared the opinion that
their schools were not stressful. Admittedly, I did not ask teachers for their definition of stress although I did appear to share a common understanding of the term with the pupils in School B.

Bullying was not considered to be a problem by any of the staff I spoke with in all three schools. Again, I did not ask staff for their definition of bullying. As far as pupils were concerned, however, bullying was, overwhelmingly, the most commonly mentioned stressor and (much to my own surprise) it was practically all that some boys spoke about. Perhaps, because so much bullying took place out of the classroom, teachers were generally unaware of it. Furthermore, as bullying was not admired, except by some bullies in School B, those indulging in this sort of behaviour were not exactly broadcasting the fact. There was also an unspoken opinion among staff that, if bullying were commonplace, they would know about it. While they were able to remain unaware of it, it could not be a major stressor. This attitude, of course, might have been teachers' way of coping with what could, undoubtedly, be a serious problem. For some boys especially, physical bullying was a very real problem. It was accepted as normal behaviour in School B that many boys missed the last lesson of the day in order to avoid being "battered" when school was over. However, because they were boys and, stereotypically, supposed to be able to look after themselves, they not only received little help but also risked being laughed at and called a "baby" by peers and even by staff if they 'complained'. Several
winners, perhaps understandably, sought to reaffirm their positions and fighting was a generally accepted pastime by many boys in School B. Some boys reported with despair that their fathers encouraged them to fight when threatened and several said that they had, reluctantly, been involved in physical fights because all their approaches for help had been ignored. Although girls were involved in fights none reported seeking help and being denied it.

Verbal bullying or slagging, was a source of stress mentioned by every pupil. Yet slagging, to many teachers, was a joke and some just laughed when I mentioned it. Comments such as, "life's like that" and "you've just got to learn to cope with it" may, indeed, be true but are of little help to a pupil who is terrified that the slaggers will translate their words into actions. Several pupils described the impatience displayed by teachers when faced with a pupil complaining of being slagged. Again, boys in particular received short shrift but the teachers' attitude appeared to suggest that both girls and boys were too old to be seeking their help with the problem of slagging. As frequently demonstrated throughout the fieldwork, teachers are not most pupils' first resource when dealing with peer problems. However, even when pupils did finally resort to enlisting their help, this was not sufficient reason for some teachers to try even to understand the pupils, never mind to offer assistance. I formed the impression that, because slagging was a problem faced by all pupils, to many teachers it was not a problem. Some teachers suggested,
confidently, that if slagging was so bad, pupils would tell them. Clearly, however, some teachers were not taking me seriously and if they were not prepared to do that for me, how much less seriously would they take a pupil (with a personal, vested interest) who tried to tell them the same sorts of thing?

Similarly, arguments with friends were blithely dismissed with the words, "All children fall out. They've just got to learn to deal with it". Again, this may be true but such a comment can be damaging to those who, describing such a stressor, reported that they could neither eat nor sleep and described how they were unable to concentrate on anything that went on in school. Girls, in particular, were subject to this sort of stressor and the loss of a best friend, who acted as an emotional buffer against the world, left many feeling exposed and vulnerable. In the majority of these cases the help of mothers or older sisters had been enlisted but the pain these girls experienced and described was very real and all-encompassing.

So many stressors described by the pupils were simply disregarded by staff either because they were problems that everyone had to face (which, somehow, made them non-problems) or because the teachers, themselves, did not consider them stressful. Several teachers made no attempt to view a stressor from the pupil's position whilst others used the opportunity to explain that a situation was stressful for a pupil because of some lack in the pupil;
almost as if it were an unalterable fact, like the colour of a pupil's eyes. Perhaps I should not have been surprised by the staff's reactions. Many pupils had opened up and shared stories which they had, shamefully, kept hidden for fear of just those sorts of responses described above. For the very reason that so many stressors had not previously been brought to the surface and examined, no coping strategy had been found for them and so they remained a source of stress. I wondered how many teachers would revise their opinions were they to listen to the sorts of comments I had heard from the pupils. After all, I, too, had been surprised by some of the stressors mentioned by the pupils and just as closed as some of the staff in my attitude to the pupils. For example, I had been told by many pupils during the Group and Individual Conversations in School B about the slagging that took place in many classes. However, as demonstrated above, telling someone something is no guarantee that it will be 'heard' and I certainly did not 'hear' the slagging stories in any way that allowed me to comprehend, other than at a surface level, what was taking place in those classes. Perhaps, as with the teachers, I thought I understood and placed little real value on the information. After all, we teachers have all heard such remarks in our own classrooms and we 'know' that most of them are harmless 'fun'; not something to be taken seriously. It was only when I attended lessons that I was able to appreciate the damaging and stunting affect of so much of the pupils' banter. None of the remarks was directed at me but, from my position as researcher, I had the time and energy to identify with the
pupils; to try to put myself in their position and come to 'know' what they had been telling me. Until then, I had failed to give the slagging the importance it so clearly merited despite the fact that I had, repeatedly, been told about it. Most teachers in School B appeared to be oblivious of the pupils' hurtful comments and I heard no teacher reprimand any pupils for their remarks. Having pupils and teachers in school all day means that they play a role in each other's social processes. According to Kelly (1955, p.97), a role is "an on-going pattern of behaviour" and is defined in terms of interpersonal acting based on the understanding of other people. Having, to an extent, surprised myself with my findings and having been confronted with the sorts of responses from teachers, described above, I was led to wonder about the sorts of construing of the pupils' constructions that are carried out by the teachers. Conversely, this raises the issue of what kinds of construing by the pupils informs their part of the relationship. It appeared that many pupils and teachers, despite ostensibly being engaged in the same purpose for four or five years, became increasingly out of touch with each other as time progressed.

Sources of stress varied from second to third years mainly in accordance with changes which took place in the pupils' social life in that time. Several described the tensions in school created by the greater freedom they were being allowed out of school. The role of the passive school child was becoming increasingly uncomfortable for many and several
remarked that they were no longer prepared to be "ordered about" by teachers and to behave in "quiet, cowardly" ways in class.

Several pupils, in describing the changes which had taken place in their lives between the Group and Individual Conversations, included a perceived shift in their own self-image. All who mentioned this point regarded themselves more positively. They described themselves as being more confident, more independent, less easily intimidated and more able to "stand up" for themselves. None of this newfound confidence, it appeared, was born of activities or transactions within the school although the benefits could be transmitted to and developed within the school setting. Instead, pupils spoke positively about their social encounters with new friends, club members, colleagues at work and customers. It was evident, therefore, that changes in one area of the pupils' lives had a spin-off effect in other areas. Most pupils who made this point reported that several situations, which they had found stressful in second year, were no longer stressful. They attributed this shift to their experiencing a wider range of social transactions, as a result of which many earlier stressors diminished in size and no longer assumed their previous importance.

Some stressors had lessened in degree from second to third years. For example, there was a general consensus that there were fewer physical fights in third year. The reason given for this shift was that third year pupils were bigger
and better able to defend themselves than first and second years who were more likely to be victims of bullies. The verbal bullies, however, appeared to be as active as ever, with the victim's increased size and age appearing to be no deterrent. Several girls reported that stress in school was exacerbated by an increased domestic workload which enforced a maturity at odds with the immaturity enforced by many teachers in their attempts to 'manage' the pupils. Some girls also mentioned strained relationships with peers resulting from being allowed less social freedom than their friends. No boy in the study mentioned either of these last two stressors.

Many of the new stances adopted by third year pupils were stressful for some of their teachers who, not liking the changes they observed, strove (frequently unsuccessfully) to make the pupils toe the line. Such power struggles often alienated teacher and pupil even further and as sociality between them declined, so some pupils lost interest in the teacher's subject. Conversely, several pupils reported improved relations with staff in third year resulting, they said, from the fact that teachers expected them to change (that is, to grow up) and they responded favourably to the teachers' expectations.

One aim, professed in almost every school handbook I have read, is to foster and develop a sense of responsibility in its pupils. However, almost all pupils who spoke on this theme reported that it was as a result of out-of-school
activities that their sense of responsibility (which could then be translated to the school situation) was developed. It was clear, from many conversations, that pupils were given important, responsible parts to play in their different, out-of-school organisations and these roles were described seriously and with pride. Indeed, some pupils spoke as if their contribution were absolutely vital. No pupils, however, described any important or necessary roles they had to fulfil in school and, as individuals, they did not consider they were necessary to the functioning of the school in any way.

Growth and change in one area of the pupils' lives very often led to growth and change in other areas. The time between the Group and Individual Conversations provided the greatest opportunities for this sort of development. Most pupils delighted in their new-found social freedom and their widening circle of friends and these contributed to their reasons for preferring third year to second year. Although many were pleased to be rid of subjects which did not interest them, school work, as such, played little or no part in their preference for third year. Instead, many, excitedly, described the various ways in which they were challenging authority, firstly in their out-of-school activities and, resulting from that, in their transactions with staff and peers. As pupils were given greater freedom by their parents, so they were able to experience (in the Kellyan sense) a greater number of people and situations. This, it emerged, had an effect not only on how they coped
with the new experiences but also how they dealt with known situations. Several described how they were able to channel previously negative energies into more productive areas whilst others spoke of discovering strengths and talents previously unknown. Such self-knowledge brought about self-change which was both exciting and challenging. Even those few pupils who claimed that their lives had changed little from second to third years were not unaffected by their peers' social development and admitted to alterations in their own behaviour as a result of experiencing their peers differently. However, if, as Kelly explained, the 'self' is a construct like any other, then self-construing must elaborate in keeping with our construing of the world at large. We should, therefore, expect to find a developing and unfolding quality in the self-construing of pupils as they grow older.

7.1.6 Coping Strategies

As with the sources of stress, the coping strategies used by the pupils tended to follow a pattern. Although each pupil had a different story to tell, the themes that emerged were very similar.

As a result of discussing coping strategies I became increasingly aware of the extent to which the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of the individual were interconnected. Imbalance between any of these areas affected the pupil's ability to cope. This effect, whether
positive or negative, tended to be self-perpetuating: where one situation was successfully coped with, there was a likelihood that the next situation would be encountered successfully also. The reverse of this was also true, as was the fact that a series of failures could mean that the pupil experienced difficulty in coping with situations which, normally, presented no problem. This pattern could be interrupted by a blow or a boost to the pupil's self confidence.

It also emerged that coping strategies used in one area of the pupils' lives tended to be transferred to other areas of their lives. This transference applied to both good and bad coping behaviours and occasionally successful strategies (by pupils' own standards) were supplanted by less successful ones (again, by pupils' own standards) which were more in keeping with the pupils' changing image of themselves. The former coping behaviours, although successful at one level, were inappropriate at another and, therefore, discarded. For example, some pupils reported "answering back" in third year because they no longer saw themselves as the sort of people who "just sat and took it". Despite the fact that they were often punished for their efforts and readily admitted that answering back was not a good way of coping, many continued to behave in this way; some complaining, all the while, that they were being picked on. The more astute pupils, however, learned how far to push the boundaries and some delighted in treading the narrow paths (which varied from teacher to teacher) between acceptable and sanctionable
behaviour. Apart from the fact that punishments ate into the pupil's own time it was not considered "clever", by third year pupils in particular, to "be caught". It appeared that the astute pupils were better able to construe their teachers constructions than those who complained of being picked on. Salmon (1986, p.19) explained what she meant by this:

...to be a mature construer means being able to anticipate other people - their reactions, their behaviour. And that, in turn, means being able to understand their intentions, their feelings, their personal stance.

The ways in which coping strategies were tried out across a range of situations became especially clear in the pupils' third year where they were experiencing new situations out of school and experimenting with new coping strategies. Many of these new coping behaviours were, tentatively, brought into school where they were tried out and, subsequently, copied by others. Despite the fact that many coping strategies were, clearly, learned from other people (judging by the pupils' reports), the majority of pupils were adamant that they did not deliberately copy someone else's way of coping. It might be more apt to say that many coping strategies were unconsciously picked up, rather than actively learned from other people. Most of those who, having trouble with a specific situation, had consciously tried to emulate a friend's successful coping strategy reported finding it just as unsuccessful as their own. Failure might have resulted from the lack of confidence which many of those using unfamiliar coping strategies
reported. On the other hand, the coping strategies might have been inappropriate because they contravened the self-image of the person using it. This was the case with Janet and Alan (both described in Appendix 34). For Janet, being threatened with expulsion and for Alan, being put on report, so threatened their self-image that they were forced to reconsider, and subsequently change, their previous coping behaviours. The way in which we perceive ourselves is a powerful determinant of what we may and may not learn as Frost (1980, p.70) demonstrated:

We construct images of ourselves which influence not only what we do, but also how we interpret the consequences of what we do. Thus, such images may profoundly affect what we can learn both about ourselves and about the world around us. On the one hand, they may direct us towards new discoveries. On the other, they may rule out whole areas of activity and knowledge.

Those pupils who, by their own admission, were not coping successfully were, in most cases, able to suggest a variety of other coping strategies but none that they were prepared to implement. From talking with these pupils it was evident (as it was with pupils who attempted unfamiliar strategies) that many of their coping suggestions ran contrary to the image they had of themselves and were, therefore, deemed inappropriate. Of all the pupils with whom I spoke, the ones in this particular category had, by far, the least insight into their situations stemming, I would suggest, from a lack of personal insight. Conversation with them was difficult because they kept returning to the same points which focused on how they were simply hapless victims and,
as such, were impotent to initiate any change. Most, however, were not short of suggestions about how others should behave towards them. Unfortunately, they were without any understanding of their own role in the situations and most were caught in a self-perpetuating cycle of negative transactions with which they were most unhappy. In the interests of these pupils in particular, it would be helpful if teachers had some understanding of the development of self-awareness and the factors which might influence it, since the way that pupils see themselves depends upon the way they believe other people, including teachers, see them. Tied up with self-awareness is the concept of locus of control. As Phares (1976) demonstrated, people who consider that they are without control over their lives are unable to see the tie between their actions and the results of these actions. There is a place, therefore, for encouraging pupils to reflect on what they have experienced and to take responsibility for their part in the experience rather than merely regarding themselves as victims of circumstances.

Pupils' criteria for evaluating coping strategies showed more maturity than I would previously have believed. That pupils repeatedly used the same coping strategies would suggest that they considered them to be appropriate. However, this was not necessarily the case, as demonstrated above. Even strategies which appeared to work, for example, winning a fight or shouting down a classmate or teacher, were not always considered to be good if they ran contrary
to the pupils' image of themselves. This would suggest that a repertoire of coping strategies is, in itself, not sufficient. To be appropriate, the choice of coping behaviours must have personal relevance for the pupil. As the self-image held by the majority of the pupils was that of a 'good' person, most did not rate strategies which involved harming others in any way as being a good way of coping. This, of course, is not the same as saying that pupils did not behave in unkind or hurtful ways. Many reported that their behaviour was often less than ideal but, with few exceptions, they were not proud of this sort of conduct. It was evident that most pupils (even the most disaffected) wanted to have harmonious relationships with those around them but, for a variety of reasons, some were unable to achieve this ambition. Those at the far extreme, who saw no prospect of improving their transactions with staff and/or peers, chose to opt out of school rather than continue tolerating the strife they were experiencing.

As with sources of stress, it soon became apparent that personal relationships played an important role in the coping process. All pupils (with the exception of one), to whom I asked the question "Why do some people cope better than others?", replied, without a second thought, that such people were helped by friends and family. The one exception responded that a personal quality in the individual, namely an "inner strength", enabled that person to cope. No other pupils in the study attributed good coping strategies to any factor in themselves.
In contrast with those supported by friends and family, were those pupils perceived by their peers as leading "sheltered lives", those who were considered to have few friends and those deemed to come from a "poor family". Pupils in these categories were described by their peers as being ineffective copers. And, indeed, all who reported having few friends considered that they would cope better, had they more friends. Similarly, many of those from unstable home backgrounds reported that they felt lonely and isolated and unable to cope well because of having no one in whom to confide. This isolation was further exacerbated by the shame, guilt and responsibility many felt about family problems. The main role of friends and family in mediating stress was to listen and give emotional support. The major criterion for selecting someone in whom to confide was that the person "could be trusted". Practical help was not always sought or even wanted, as demonstrated by the fact that pupils very often preferred to confide in friends rather than parents, although the latter were usually better equipped to do something about the stressor. As several pupils pointed out, "parents have power over you" (rather like teachers) and often exacerbated a stressor by dealing with it in a way seen, by the pupil, as inappropriate. It was important that those offering support should allow the pupils to work through the stressor in their own way. Simply removing it was rarely sufficient; a learning component needed to be present, lest the stressor recurred. Trying to make sense of the stressor was necessary before
coping could be considered and several pupils reported that they needed time to think about whatever was upsetting them before being able to communicate it to others. Very often, the mere act of giving the stressor words (as witnessed in the Individual Conversations, in particular) made it more tolerable, although talking, on its own, rarely brought about any change in the actual situation. Several pupils thanked me for helping them although I had done nothing other than listen. But, of course, as stated above, being really heard is most valuable. Others, after relating their stories, used phrases such as "I didn't know that I knew that" or "I've never seen it like that before" or "I knew it before but I know it better now". I do not know whether this new perspective allowed them to cope differently as time did not permit this sort of follow-up. It would be interesting, however, to learn whether new coping strategies can be developed as a result of the sort of discussions the pupils and I had. Certainly, many pupils looked and moved as if a burden had been removed from their shoulders when they left the room after their Individual Conversation. It was not that the pupils sought my advice nor did I presume to give it. Rather, by accepting whatever the pupils offered and by encouraging them to enlarge on whatever they told me, I attempted to encourage them to articulate their stressors so that they might be more fully understood. It was as if the stressor resembled a many faceted crystal which was brought into the light and offered for examination and discussion. An understanding and compassionate listener acts as a mirror illuminating previously unseen facets of
the stressor. It is in the softer light reflected by an accepting audience that the individual is able to come to a new understanding of the self as well as of the stressor.

Although stressors for girls and boys were very similar the ways in which they coped with them in school were quite different. Girls, in particular, spoke about the invaluable, emotional support provided by best friends. Most girls were well practised in the art of talking together as witnessed by their interaction in the Group Conversations. Their "supportive/eliciting comments" (Spender, 1989, p.8) combined with body language encouraged conversation and, because they were open to each other, they could communicate in a sort of 'shorthand'. In other words, girls acted as a mirror for each other. Boys, on the other hand, did not have best friends and appeared not to support each other emotionally, as witnessed in the Group Conversations. There, the boys seemed to be closed off from each other and, because of this absence of rapport and total lack of reflection, everything had to be spelled out in detail; a situation which is not conducive to the sharing of confidences. However, unlike girls' friendship groups, intimate conversation was not the aim of boys' friendship groups. Rather, they provided a camaraderie which enabled boys to forget their stressors as they concentrated on endorsing and reinforcing the stereotypical male qualities of toughness and independence. Generally speaking, relationships between girls were much less unequal than they were between boys, as a result of which girls were
considerably more relaxed with each other than were boys. I saw girls' groups as being formed horizontally, whilst boys' arranged themselves vertically, with a clear pecking order being evident, especially in School B. This latter organisation makes personal communication difficult and renders support almost impossible. Much of the boys' behaviour was directed towards improving their position in the hierarchy and they could not afford to dissipate energy supporting a boy in need because their position on the ladder of power might be taken by another. For this reason, boys were generally left to cope on their own in school and some coped by blocking out stressors or by denying them. Although the girls also formed their own groups, movement between them (because of their organisation) was much easier than it was between boys' groups and there appeared to be little vying among the girls to achieve status. Girls, therefore, were usually able to share their problems with best friends but for boys, who were frequently engaged in competition with each other, this was rarely an option.

To make matters worse for boys, there were several, in all three schools, who reported that staff were much more sympathetic and helpful towards girls with problems than they were towards boys who were not encouraged to bring their personal concerns to the teachers' attention. These boys complained that they were regarded as a nuisance by staff who tended to shrug off their approaches for help because boys, for some reason, (but not girls) ought to be able to deal with their personal problems. On the other
hand, perhaps teachers regarded personal problems as trivial and not something that should be allowed to stand between boys and their academic work. There may be more truth than I realised in the statements of some girls in School B when they said "a lot is expected of them" (boys), whereas, "nobody expects much of girls". Whatever the reason, such attempts to foster independence (if this is the motive behind teachers' behaviour) in boys does little to help anyone and can be decidedly damaging for those without the resources to cope effectively. Nor does such behaviour encourage boys to seek teachers' help in the future. Perhaps teachers think (if they give the subject any thought at all) that their pupils are coping well when they cease to approach them for help and perhaps such thinking reinforces their idea that dismissing pupils' approaches for assistance is the correct way to deal with pupils' personal problems. It would be interesting to find out if teachers share the boys' perceptions that staff offer less emotional support to boys than they do to girls.

Broadly speaking, the boys took themselves much more seriously than the girls which is perhaps not surprising, considering that they were frequently engaged in power struggles with each other. As, according to Salmon (In Press), we live in a society which is structured by power, conflict and inequality, it should not be surprising that the boys, in particular, attempted to reproduce these very features within their own relationships. That the power games were not to the liking of some boys was evident in the
Individual Conversations when several reported that they found it difficult to relax in the company of other boys and that they felt more comfortable with girls, to whom they did not constantly have to prove their worth. "Taking dares", "acting hard" and "not being bothered" were all part of the power struggle which served to decide who was (and who was not) worthy of "respect". Some boys in all three schools seemed almost obsessed with being given respect by their peers and by staff. The degree of respect correlated with their position in the pecking order. Denied this respect, several resorted to verbal and physical threats in their attempts to secure it; just the sort of behaviour, I should have thought, that would destroy any stirrings of respect that might be felt. One of the ways in which respect was shown involved laughing at any jokes made. This may explain why some girls said that "boys have to show off and be funny". Much of boys' behaviour was acted out on a public platform. Judging by pupils' comments, these boys performed principally for each other, "showing off" and seeking endorsement of their masculinity as they attempted to secure power within the group. Essentially, many boys appeared to need (some quite desperately) to be reflected at twice their natural size, to use Woolf's (1984) terminology. Unlike the reflection, however, which results from talking with a sympathetic listener, this reflection is, in fact, a distortion of the real person. A distortion, nevertheless, which would appear to be essential to the self-esteem and functioning ability of many boys.
Boys, it appeared, were offered fewer acceptable ways of behaving than girls. Boys, themselves, stringently reinforced the narrow behavioural parameters, weeding out, kicking out and showing up those who strayed too near the edges of acceptable male conduct. It was almost as if masculinity were so fragile that it would crumble and fall apart if it were not constantly reinforced. This approach was accepted as 'normal' by many of the boys in School B and by the 'men' in School A. Academically ambitious boys did not appear to need to behave in this way (at least they did not mention it); perhaps they achieved status by succeeding at school work in School A which was (for both girls and boys) academically competitive. Not only did many of the pupils in School A take the academic competition for granted and strive to succeed in it, many knew each others' marks and where they ranked in the 'cleverness ratings'. Academic success, however, had no status and was not encouraged by pupils in School B.

In all three schools there were several sad, lonely and mystified boys who had been kicked out of the male pack because they failed to shape-up to 'real male standards'. In most cases these boys had no one, either in or out of school, to turn to for help. Conversation with some of them was very difficult and it was almost as if they had lost the ability to express their feelings. It is, of course, difficult to put into words that which we do not understand and, without practice, these boys were very confused. Several boys spoke about hiding their feelings from
themselves by "not thinking" about their stressors and "deliberately thinking about something else". Where there is an absence of support to deal with stressors, 'not thinking' can be seen as a way of attempting to cope. This approach can become a habit and as such is unlikely to lead to elaboration of the construct system. Some boys had so internalised the 'macho' image that they seemed to have lost touch with many of their feelings, judging by the fact that any sort of conversation concerning stress was almost impossible. Feelings of fear, anxiety, timidity and uncertainty (stereotypical, female qualities) had little place in the world of many boys and any male who dared to show such feelings risked being mocked and shunned almost "as if he'd got something catching". At the very time when boys needed the greatest support in school (for example, if they had been humiliated in some way) it was, generally, denied them and they were left alone to "lick their wounds". Given such a reception it is hardly surprising that many boys choose to deny such painful feelings in themselves. In similar humiliating circumstances, girls, even unpopular girls, were helped and supported by other girls, much to the envy of many boys. This raises the question of whether adult males tend to use denial as a coping strategy more than adult females. As demonstrated by the pupils, denial can be used successfully as a way of coping with short-term stressors (for example, pupils in Phase Four insisting that my presence was not stressful but being able, the following day to admit that it was). However, as a way of coping with long-term stressors it cannot be considered healthy because
individuals cannot examine, discuss, learn from and deal with that which they deny exists.

Emotional support, although lacking in school for boys was, usually, provided within the family by mothers and/or older sisters. The fact that fathers were never mentioned in the role of emotional support is perhaps not surprising when it is evident that, as boys, the majority never learn this essential skill. Furthermore, I see no reason to presume that they suddenly acquire the desire (never mind the ability) to nourish others emotionally, as adults. This fact might be more easily understood if males did not need or want emotional nourishment. However, this is far from the case. From talking with the pupils it became very clear that girls and boys seek and receive emotional support from females. If fathers are not providing their children with emotional support it is most unlikely that they are supporting their partners in this way but are, in all probability, expecting to be emotionally supported by the females in the home. I was rather left wondering about the role of the father in the family, other than as an extra wage earner. Although present in the majority of homes, fathers very seldom figured in the pupils' conversations. It certainly appeared that mothers (many of whom worked full-time) were responsible for practically every aspect of hearth and home (Spender, 1989).

Pupils who reported spending much of their time in the company of adults or older female siblings seemed to be more
articulate than many of those who did not mention this fact. Broadly speaking, these pupils came across to me as being the most effective copers and were very often able to see a stressor from different positions and could frequently describe and evaluate different coping strategies they had considered and/or tried. Family members and what these people had advised were often mentioned in the course of pupils' conversations. From talking with these pupils it was evident that the majority developed their coping strategies over years of being encouraged to discuss personal events with members of the family. The result seemed to be an enhanced sense of self and an ability to construe other people psychologically. Although less able copers also discussed stressors with family members they appeared to have a less rounded view of the problem than those whose coping was more effective. This might have resulted from the fact that family in-put to the conversation was usually limited to advising the pupil to ignore the problem in the hope that it would, somehow, disappear. When such advice failed, most pupils reported that they were not given an alternative strategy. The result, generally, was that pupils stopped mentioning the stressor at home.

Not all pupils, however, developed their self-esteem or the ability to construe psychologically within the family. For one boy the understanding, accepting 'teacher' was the milkman with whom he worked, for another boy it was the fishmonger who employed him; for one girl it was the leader
of the drama group to which she belonged and for another it was the regular customers she met on her "cream round". Other pupils also mentioned adults, outside the home, who were prepared to take them seriously, to value them and give them a sense of their own worth. It appeared that, in exchanging information and ideas with these adults, the pupils were enabled to see people, situations and themselves more clearly and to build up a repertoire of, personally relevant, coping strategies from which to choose. As Postman and Weingartner (1971) and Rogers (1969) argued, it is important to realise that significant learning will take place only if the learner perceives personal relevance in what is being learned. And, as so clearly demonstrated, personal relevance is the key factor in the learning of successful coping strategies.

It might, therefore, be beneficial if teachers were to concentrate on enabling pupils to get in touch with their own learning processes. In this way pupils can rid themselves (if they so choose) of their negative cycles of behaviour and replace them with more productive practices. In School B, in particular, many pupils seemed to believe that learning was something that happened to them as a consequence, simply, of attending school. Very few appeared to have any appreciation of their role in the learning process. Perhaps secondary schools' concentration on the content of learning has been carried out at the cost of diminishing the pupil's innate ability to learn how to learn.
When people feel that they are understood they are more willing to accept another's point of view. Several pupils reported that, as a result of having a fulfilling role to play in some out-of-school activity, they were able to reconsider, in a more favourable light, teachers' assessments of their work and behaviour. In construct theory terms behaviour is considered to be a question rather than an answer, a proposition as opposed to a reaction. These pupils, from their interactions with caring, significant others, learned to understand the question or proposition better than those who had fewer exchanges with adults. As Bannister and Fransella (1986, p.31) explained:

A person's behaviour will make little ultimate sense to us unless we understand the questions they are asking.

It was evident that those pupils, whom I would describe as being good copers, were able to hear what teachers (even when they were being told off) and their peers (even when they were being slated) were saying. They were able to examine the remarks "in case I can learn anything" yet, at the same time, they could keep the comments at arm's length and reject those that were unhelpful without feeling diminished in any way. In contrast with these pupils were those who took all negative comments to heart and felt demolished by them. Those pupils coped by trying hard not to hear what was being said by either teachers or their peers and, therefore, they were unable to separate the helpful remarks from those which were simply hurtful. Some
had become so defensive that they saw all comments as criticism and constantly complained of being picked on. Under these circumstances new coping strategies were out of the question because all their energy was deployed in barricading themselves, psychologically, against the stressor. Many pupils (both good and less effective copers) agreed that it was difficult to see and understand and (stemming from that) to talk about a stressor whilst in the midst of it. Several admitted that, with the gift of hindsight, their behaviour had been inappropriate but, at the time, it had seemed entirely justified. Perhaps those who are able to maintain a certain detachment, without being indifferent, are more effective copers (because they are allowed a panoramic view) than those who get so close that they are unable to focus properly.

Equally articulate as the pupils who spent much of their time with adults were those who said that they were frequently on their own, during which time they reflected on what was going on in their lives. These pupils, however, although often able to describe their stressors in great detail, were less likely than those in the first category to be able to suggest coping strategies. It appeared that, for most pupils, thinking about stress and coping was not enough to bring about effective change. For improvement to take place talk was necessary. It would appear that thinking about the stressor allows the visible facets to be seen in more detail but the presence of a sympathetic listener is necessary to allow the dark, hidden side of the stressor to
Several pupils reported that, during the evenings, they reflected on what the day at school had held for them and in this way they considered strategies which could improve their coping abilities. It was evident, however, that this exercise was indulged in mainly (but not exclusively) by those who were interested in doing well academically and whose lives were relatively well ordered and calm. This behaviour was in contrast with those who reported that they never thought about school between leaving one evening and returning the next morning. The pupils in this category had either more pressing or interesting matters to consider or else they chose not to think about school because of the anxiety that might arise from such thoughts. The anxiety experienced by these pupils resulted from their being unable to control and predict the situation with which they were faced. In Kellyan terms, anxiety results when people are aware that the situations with which they are faced lie mainly outside the range of convenience of their construct system. Kelly (1955) described anxiety as loss of implication. The individual is unable to construe a situation in the sense that its personal implications are obscure. Therefore, people experience anxiety when they can only partially construe the situations with which they are faced and too many of the implications are unknown. Generally, the areas in which people are most anxious are those in which they do not simply hope something will not happen. They are areas in which they are unable to construe
what it would mean if something did happen. These tend to be the very areas which people avoid and, therefore, they never build up any meaning for them. It is the unknown dimensions of the situation which give it its potency.

It appeared that the learning of most coping strategies was an extremely personal undertaking and not something which was usually done at a conscious level. I would suggest, therefore, that to teach coping strategies successfully would be very difficult. This is not the same as saying that pupils should not be given practical information to help them deal with situations. However, for teaching to be effective, the meanings which emerge must become personal for the pupils concerned as well as being important and significant in some part of their lives. The meanings must also be viable and useful in the pupils' transactions with other people and the world around them. Without being based in the real-life situations faced by the pupils the teaching of coping strategies can remain only academic and unlikely to be assimilated on a personal level. As pupils, by their own admission, are not prepared to discuss personal stressors in class, any exercise can be only theoretical and, probably, without practical application. Additionally, in the area of personal relationships, where there are so many variables which cannot be controlled, the teaching of strategies with which to deal with them would be unlikely to succeed in the forum of the classroom.

If we share Kelly's definition of sociality as being
essential to the mutual understanding of each other's constructs then relationships cannot merely be incidental to learning, they are vital to it. As Salmon (1980, p.5) explained:

...people learn through relationships with other people; that knowledge is never independent of personal meanings and values, and ...it is embedded in social structures and groupings.

Many pupils complained that teachers discouraged social relationships between pupils in class, seeing them as potentially disruptive rather than as a basis for learning. However, the cognitive and social aspects of learning cannot be separated. Salmon and Claire (1984) demonstrated that, for pupils, academic lessons are, essentially, social situations.

Pupils must be encouraged to discover personally relevant coping strategies for themselves; to find their own identities by growth rather than by constraints, to discover their own strengths and weaknesses and to develop towards being a fully functioning adult. Kohlberg (1963, p.89) described the pupil's move away from obedience in order to avoid punishment towards what he called, "the morality of individual principles of conscience". This he recognised is no easy process. The aim of personal autonomy may never be fully realised. Dearden (1972, p.448) defined autonomy thus:

A person is autonomous to the degree that what he thinks and does in the
more important areas of his life cannot be explained without reference to his activity of mind.

A degree of personal autonomy can be seen as a normal and necessary social requirement and this has consequences for the curriculum, for teaching methods and for patterns of school organisation.

Linked with the notion of autonomy is that of self-esteem. The way in which individuals see themselves may be a most important factor affecting their coping behaviours and Stringer (1971, p.42) observed that:

... a large and steadily increasing mass of clinical evidence seems to link social and educational failures, mental illness and delinquency and crime to poor self-esteem.

As the inability to cope effectively may be related to low self-esteem it is crucial that the teacher be aware of its nature and development. As self-esteem is learned it can be changed and often it is the teacher who has the opportunity to facilitate its development in pupils. Purkey (1970) discussed six factors (challenge, freedom, respect, warmth, control and success) which create an atmosphere conducive to the development of a favourable self-image.

7.1.7 Some Final Thoughts

The fieldwork for this study, conducted over a period of four school terms, opened my eyes to the day-to-day lives of pupils in a way that 17 years of teaching did not. I was
made aware, in ways which surprised and saddened me, of the enormous gulf not only between the worlds of many pupils and their teachers but also between many teachers and their colleagues; a gulf which makes meaningful communication almost impossible. At the outset of the study I considered that pupils' perceptions of stress in school would be quite similar to my own. However, this was not the case. In my naivety, I had intended that the findings would form guidelines for work in Social Education lessons in schools. With this in mind, I had planned to include Phase Five, Peer Group Discussions. I imagined that the work done there would be an example of the sort of approach teachers might use. However, I learned in the Pilot Study (with further endorsement in the Main Study) that pupils were simply not prepared to discuss stress and coping, at a personal level, in a large group. Therefore, to have followed the Individual Conversations with Peer Group Discussions would have been counter-productive and a retrograde step. To have done so would have trivialised what I had already found out and devalued the importance of the personal nature of what the pupils had told me. I should, nevertheless, like to devise a way in which the findings from the study might enable pupils to cope more effectively with the stress they experience in school. However, at the moment I am too close to the study and need to distance myself and find time for reflection before I can attempt to cope with the formulation of the practical applications.

The fieldwork for this thesis has, for me, been a mixture of
pathos and humour. Many of the stories were, undoubtedly, sad and touching but the pupils and I also shared a great deal of laughter in the course of our conversations. I am immensely impressed not only by the trust they put in me, but also by their generosity in sharing their innermost worlds with me. I am especially heartened by the pupils' essential courage and by their vision of hope for the future.