4 To what extent do the methodologies you read about in books fail to address important aspects of the culture of your classroom? How far are these aspects connected to the culture of your country or region, and how far to student, institutional or professional-academic cultures?

Holliday, A. (1994).

4 Student groups

for Feb 18th

I have so far argued that the search for appropriate English language teaching methodologies necessitates looking at how interaction between people in the classroom is influenced by social forces outside the classroom. In Chapter 2 I considered the value of seeing these relationships in terms of the classroom as a culture. In Chapter 3 I demonstrated how this view enables us to appreciate that classroom behaviour may have social functions other than the transfer of knowledge and skills; and these functions will vary between different types of classroom culture. In order to be appropriate, English language teaching methodologies need therefore to be finely tuned to the various needs of individual classroom cultures: they need to be appropriate to local cultures in very specific terms.

In this and following chapters I shall look in more detail at various aspects of classroom cultures and how they can be understood by looking at the social contexts within which they are set. As with all cultures, classroom cultures contain different interest groups. An obvious division is between student and teacher groups. In this chapter I shall look at student groups, in Chapter 5 at teacher groups, and in Part B at how the interaction between these groups produces conflicts which need to be addressed if appropriate methodologies are to be found.

First I shall look at the notions of student group behaviour inherent in current thinking about English language teaching methodology, and how they produce a learning group ideal.

4.1 The learning group ideal

The search for universals in effective group behaviour has involved a detailed investigation of interaction, sometimes in clinical settings, independent of wider social forces. Most of the literature has concentrated on how group interaction might benefit learning (e.g. Slavin *et al.* 1985; Cortis 1977:1–36), and, more specifically, language learning (e.g. Wright 1987:36–45). This has been supported by research

in management and social psychology (e.g. Handy 1985:227–82) and by second language acquisition research (e.g. Long and Porter 1985), and has had a major influence on modern collaborative classroom methodologies both in English language teaching and elsewhere.

As a *social psychology* of student groups, this literature is indeed of great value. In arguing that, in designing collaborative methodologies for the classroom, we are capitalising on existing, normal human work behaviour, it supports Breen's (1986) argument that there are natural features within the cultures surrounding classroom interaction on which classroom methodology should capitalise [2.1]. The overall impact on English language education has been the establishment of a notion of the optimum interactional parameters within which classroom language learning can take place. For the sake of discussion, I shall call this notion the *learning group ideal*. This learning group ideal sets the conditions for a process-oriented, task-based, inductive, collaborative, communicative English language teaching methodology. (I use 'communicative' here in the sense of having classroom activities which enable students to communicate.)

However, there are important things which this micro study of student groups does not reveal. In its search for universals in group interaction, it does not look at wider, *macro* social factors, and therefore does not consider how classroom cultures in different social settings might react differently to English language teaching methodologies.

4.2 The national cultural argument

At the *macro* level, there is a growing literature on the influence of cultural differences on the learning behaviour of overseas students in a variety of classroom contexts both in their own countries and in the countries where the target language is spoken (British Council 1980; Valdes 1986; Harrison 1990; Adams *et al.* 1991, Coleman in process). However, the emphasis is on national, or even wider-scale cultural factors, which, I feel, are overgeneralised and therefore distorting.

4.2.1 Learning group ideal as the norm

Most of this literature takes the learning group ideal as the norm; and the cultural backgrounds of students are seen as inhibiting the practice of this norm. Explanations are characterised by what Hawkey and Nakornchai (1980:70) refer to as 'cultural profiling', where an attempt is made to describe common characteristics of students from one

particular country or region. Religion is a common focus in this profiling. Hence, Dudley-Evans and Swales (1980), Osterloh (1986) and Parker *et al.* (1986) describe the influence of Koranic attitudes to thought and language on the way in which students from the Middle East approach reading and writing, classroom authority and the whole business of learning. Similarly, Bowers (1980a) speaks of the influences of Buddhism in India on the study modes of students. In my own paper (Holliday and Cooke 1982:142), we use Berger *et al.*'s (1974) typology as a model, and describe basic cultural differences between Western and Eastern attitudes towards language and learning.

4.2.2 Host culture as the norm

Shamim (in process) makes similar generalisations about the cultural influences on her students in their opposition to her introduction of group work at the University of Karachi. Her article is significantly different, however, in that it is one of the rare accounts in the literature written from the point of view of an insider to the culture in question (cf. Kharma and Hajjaj 1985). She therefore speaks with considerable authority when she refers to the influence of 'the culture of the wider community' on her students' attitudes. This enables her to be more analytical in her references to culture, and also, to separate herself from, and therefore separate out, the *culture* of the English language teaching methodology which she introduces. Also, rather than looking at this innovative culture of the learning group ideal as the norm, she sees it as intrusive into the norms of the host national culture. It is indicative, in her account, that she begins with a feeling that there is need for improvement in the way English is taught in her institution, but she has to look to BANA-published literature for ideas. She tries these ideas intelligently, and finds that their implementation is highly problematic.

There are also outsider accounts of local national cultural norms influencing what happens in the classroom, which see the learning group ideal as intrusive – e.g. Coleman (in process) in Indonesia, and Miller and Emel (1988) referring to Pakistani secondary education. Miller and Emel go so far as to see this intrusion as cultural imperialism.

4.3 The need to consider smaller cultures

Following my argument in Chapters 2 and 3, I suggest that most of this literature overgeneralises the issue in attaching it to *national* or *regional* cultural influences. Looking back at the complex of different types of

cultural influences in Figure 2 [2.7], we see that there may be a variety of cultural influences on student behaviour, such as classroom and institution culture, which it is important to consider in the search for appropriate methodologies, and which need to be considered differently according to their nature. Figure 2 shows that, although national culture can be a major overriding influence, professional-academic communities, which in turn influence institution and classroom cultures, partially transcend national cultural boundaries and are influenced by international education-related cultures.

The ways in which such diverse variables can inhibit or enable the practice of the learning group ideal can be seen in the Ain Shams curriculum development project. The classroom conditions which prevail in the classes described might seem extreme. However, they are not uncommon in many of the world's tertiary institutions; and how they stand up to the learning group ideal is therefore significant.

4.3.1 National cultural traits or a lack of resources

Observations carried out in classes where the learning group ideal had not been introduced revealed several things about student behaviour (Holliday 1991a:237–40). When I say, 'had not been introduced', I am however aware that there is no such thing as a classroom culture in Egypt totally unaffected by foreign methodologies. I have already commented [3.5.3], that there is no such thing as a virgin culture. This host educational environment, perhaps more than some others, was already being influenced considerably by expatriate English language teaching practitioners. These observations came five years in to a joint ODA-USAID-funded project. Egypt itself has a long history of cosmopolitanism. First of all, students appeared to prefer close proximity. This was particularly evident in one small class where:

> Two students arrived shortly after the beginning of the class. It was interesting that despite there being plenty of space in the room, all the students sat next to each other in the front row, in adjacent seats. On two occasions an arriving student sat on a seat without moving the bag and books of a student already seated in an adjacent seat, merely pushing them slightly to allow room to sit. This seemed evidence of close proxemics and lack of inhibition in sharing space.
>
> (Observation notes)

This ability to share space, and an overall gregariousness, seemed fundamental in the ways in which the students coped with large classes of between 60 and 450. In cases where there were not sufficient seats to

go round, students were seen taking turns to sit down. This informal co-operation between students extended to arranging seating and the distribution of lecture notes. For example, in one class I observed that one student:

> was responsible for acting as agent in the distribution of the best copies of lecture notes to the other students, and therefore got hers free. She also organised seating and anything else that needed organising. The lecturer found it convenient to go through her for any dealings he had with the class as a whole.
>
> (Observation notes)

This ability for informal group co-operation to cope with the crisis of scarce resources seen amongst students was also seen in the wider *institution culture*. Space sharing was observed where a seminar took place in a room which 'doubled as the office of the head of department, who sat at her desk' conducting business while the seminar was going on, and in the offices of university administrators:

> It is common for such people to hold audience with several different parties at the same time. If the office is large, and a large number of parties are present, one may have to wait a considerable length of time to get attention. Often, in such cases, waiting parties, or parties that have had their turn, may hold their own separate meetings in the same room simultaneously.
>
> (Observation notes)

Within the wider *national culture* there was also the frequently seen example of informal co-operation in the face of crisis when seated passengers on crowded trams held the bags etc. of standing passengers, to whom they were strangers, and then passed them out through the windows when the passengers had alighted, because it was too difficult to carry them through the crush on the tram. On trams, too, when the crush of passengers was too great for the ticket collector to get to all the passengers, some passengers helped to collect fares.

The close proxemics, gregariousness and connected informal co-operation of students could thus be traced to wider cultural traits seen *both* in the host institution and the wider society. Close proxemics and greg-ariousness would therefore seem to be national cultural traits. There is research which connects proxemic behaviour with national or wider geographical cultural groups. An example of this is Watson and Graves (1973), who carry out a psychological experiment and find that 'Latin' and 'Arab' respondents prefer closer proximity than do Northern European respondents. Morain (1986:73) refers to the 'high

contact cultures' of Arabs, Latin-Americans, Greeks and Turks as distinct from the 'low contact cultures' of Americans and North Europeans. However, the significance of close proxemics and gregariousness in the classroom may also have much to do with what might be regarded as an external, economic variable: the severe lack of resources in terms of space, acoustics, seating, books and materials and distance from the teacher (see Holliday 1993; Pett 1987). I do not wish to go into whether or not economic forces are external or internal to a culture; I simply wish to make the point that there were economic forces acting on the behavioural traits of students in this particular situation which were not peculiar to Egyptian, Arab or even Middle Eastern culture, but which are common through much of the developing world.

4.3.2 Responsibility and motivation

Also observed were the students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning and their motivation. In large classes of over 50, the physical distance between teacher and students meant that close monitoring of student work by the teacher was extremely difficult. The students, however, seemed to be used to this state of affairs and took responsibility (Holliday 1991a:297–300). This was exemplified in one class, where the local lecturer gave a half-hour lecture on half a set of rules in linguistics and then 'told the class that they would get the second half the following week and referred them to a book on generative phonology to read in preparation' (Observation notes).

Involved with this taking of responsibility was the students' motivation, in spite of the harsh classroom conditions. The proof of this motivation was the fact that they continued to attend, despite some lecturers apparently making 'little attempt to communicate with the students' and 'signs of student boredom' (Observation notes). It is important to add caution here, however, as I have already suggested that outsider observers would not necessarily be able to know whether or not, or what type of, communication was going on [3.4.1].

It would be erroneous to try and trace these traits directly to the national culture. As with student ability in informal co-operation, they could be traced partly to the force of economic conditions, and partly to an educational ideology, both of which were wider influences than the national culture. That students do not expect close monitoring by their teachers is not necessarily a result of scarce resources in large classes. Large classes themselves, as well as being common in the developing world, are also found in some countries in the developed world, such as Japan (LoCastro 1989, in process), and are not necessarily characteristic of scarce resources. Large classes might be permissible where prevailing

educational ideologies do not see the role of the teacher as a monitor of learning, but as a fount of knowledge, which is delivered without any concession to students, and which students must struggle to attain. Indeed, this is an international educational norm found in the traditional British university. I shall deal with this issue in detail in Chapter 5, where I shall argue that English language education is in many ways unusual in being opposed to this norm. Thus if large classes in Egyptian faculties of education were in any way supported by educational ideology, this too, might not be traced only to a local Koranic attitude to education [4.2.1], but also at least partly to a more international educational ideology. Hence, although features of a local classroom culture, student gregariousness and responsibility for learning were at least partially influenced by factors that transcend the host national culture.

4.3.3 'Conservative' attitudes to education

In classes where the learning group ideal had been introduced, although there was evidence that students were well able to adapt to the innovation, which could be seen, after all, as just another crisis in the wake of all the others with which they had to cope, there was also evidence of deeper student attitudes which remained to a degree unconvinced. These attitudes could have been influenced by a variety of national and other types of cultural forces. They represent the conservatism characteristic of any culture undergoing the tensions of change referred to earlier [2.6].

In discovery-oriented activities, although the students generally seemed to take to them very well, they showed uneasiness. They seemed unsure about having to 'think' rather than reiterate what their 'teacher' had 'given' them. This insecurity implied dissatisfaction with the learning group ideal's insistence on a problem-solving rather than a didactic approach. Although often associated with national Koranic culture [4.2.1], this preference for didactic instruction rather than learning by discovery is also attributable to a common international view of education. In my own reading class, the students did not seem to appreciate what they had been doing, or why they were doing it in this part of the curriculum:

> At the end [of the class] I asked the students what they thought they had learnt. They said that they didn't feel that they had been reading. As in other cases ... several of the students said that it was not 'reading' because there was no reading aloud. They said that they never had anything like this normally (i.e. discussion and group work).
>
> (Observation notes)

As trainee teachers, these students seemed to appreciate the fact that I was demonstrating something practical. They were sufficiently bright to see a connection between my methodology and a methodology they might use as teachers in the future; but silent reading for the purpose of finding information did *not* seem to be 'reading' to them. Their more normal expectation seemed to be to read aloud for their lecturer to monitor. (See the reference to students' expectation of reading as 'the word-by-word sounding of a text' in Holliday 1986b:25, 26n, citing observations by Silberstein.) They did *not* seem to think that I was teaching them to read. Whereas the learning group ideal tries to connect target skills with those outside the classroom in real life, the more formal attitude to education depicted here sees classroom skills as quite separate from real-life skills; and it may be that for these students 'reading' in real life, in the wider society outside the classroom, had a different definition from that promoted by the learning group ideal.

In another class, in which I gave a guest lesson, I was carrying out a very traditional (in my terms) essay writing lesson in which the students worked in groups to collect ideas and then were supposed to help me to compile an outline on the blackboard. However, presumably being unused to handouts, their first reaction to the worksheet which was handed out to them at the beginning was that it was an examination paper:

> Then I asked them to do the first activity without any help from me. They seemed to find this very difficult. Some students left; and one student at the front pleaded with me to explain what on earth I was trying to do (almost in those terms). They were clearly unused to this type of approach. I managed to get them on task after talking them through the first two activities. Then the same spokesperson told me that they were surprised that the essay style I was teaching them was so simple, with so few parts. I suspected that they had been previously lectured on several complex forms of the essay with little practical application.
>
> (Observation notes)

My supposition about the form their essay classes normally took 'was later confirmed by several local colleagues' (Observation notes). Barjesteh and Holliday, commenting on problems local students had adapting to the learning group ideal's inductive approach in grammar lessons, see anxiety about examinations as central, in that:

> Students, who seem to have been brought up on the deductive approach ... want superficial 'knowledge' [to learn] for the examination [through which] they want to move too quickly and are unwilling to discuss and explore.
>
> (Barjesteh and Holliday 1990:90)

These expectations on the part of the students, that a deductive methodology was most appropriate, and that an inductive approach might be interesting but inappropriate, reflected classroom cultural norms. These norms might have been in turn influenced by the *professional-academic culture* of their teachers, which I shall deal with in Chapter 5, and also the norms of the host *institution culture*, which, being a university, was not disposed to the teaching, by 'qualified' lecturers, of language skills, but rather the teaching of language theory. This point was exemplified in another class which I observed, where the students did in fact seem to be getting on with an inductive approach without any problems. Their local lecturer was an assistant lecturer – i.e. an MA holder. In the discussion after the class:

> I asked why the students seemed so willing to communicate and take part in informal discussion (he had also said that they were used to writing in class and working in groups) when other lecturers said that local students would never 'accept' this. He seemed surprised at the question. He didn't think his students were very different from those in other faculties or universities (elicited). Then, after more discussion of lecturer roles, he said that perhaps the students would accept this from junior lecturers but not from lecturers with PhDs. The latter would be expected to lecture more because they had more to give. (This was also borne out by a PhD lecturer who finds it difficult to get his students to accept him not lecturing.)
>
> (Observation notes)

Indeed, that the students derived considerable satisfaction from formal professorialism was illustrated in their insistence on calling all their teachers 'doctor'. This cult of the professor, and the desire for deductive learning which seems to go with it, is not restricted to Egypt, the Middle East, or even the developing world. It is also reported by Maley (1980) with regard to French students. Although it is impossible to verify the connection, it needs to be considered that that this attitude might be influenced by an *international* educational ideology [4.3.2] rather than be a product of Egyptian culture. (cf. Herrera's 1992:1–2 brief discussion of multiple influences, including French, on Egyptian education.)

4.4 The problem of appropriacy

Another area in which cultural arguments have sometimes been overgeneralised is that of the problem students from different countries

have in acquiring the writing styles required in classes taught by native-speaker teachers, especially in English for academic purposes.

Dudley-Evans and Swales (1980) refer to a further 'cultural' problem with regard to Middle Eastern students – that of discourse style. They compare a text from an Arabic newspaper with an equivalent one as it would appear in an English newspaper, and show that they have very different rhetorical and organisational forms. This type of difference between Arabic and English text is verified by al Jubbouri (1984), where it is argued that in Arabic, poetic repetition and clausal and phrasal stringing is a predominant feature, whereas this is not so in English texts, where argument is staged, with introductions and conclusions setting and finalising the point, and clausal and phrasal embedding is the norm. (See also Sa'adeddin 1991.)

I do not deny that there is considerable truth in this argument, but again it comprises a generalisation which is not particularly useful. The form which a particular piece of discourse takes can be seen in terms of a discourse culture – corresponding to a discourse community. Some of the papers in Adams *et al.* (1991) begin to follow this line of argument. Bloor and Bloor demonstrate how students from a wide range of countries, European and elsewhere, have difficulties because of a 'false expectation that educational structures and systems do not differ internationally' (1991:2). They find it strange that in Britain, in writing academic assignments: 'The game is not to show the assessor that you know the facts, but to show the assessor *what you have read, and, moreover, what you think about what you have read* (Ibid.:2)'. This feature, and stylistic features such as hedging and acknowledging in academic writing, are not so much a product of national cultural differences as of differences between academic discourse communities with which students from different parts of the world are familiar.

A particular national culture will incorporate many discourse cultures; and at the same time many of these cultures will transcend national culture in the same way as professional-academic cultures can transcend national cultures. Thus, the discourse culture of science, which itself incorporates many smaller discourse cultures related to individual disciplines, may in many ways be *inter*national. I have already referred to Ballard's (in process) analysis of specialised educational sub-cultures within one society [3.5.2].

This might explain why, in my own multi-national Diploma TEFL class in Britain, with fifty per cent British students, *all* parties seemed to have difficulty mastering the academic discourse of English language education required by their assignments. Both the German and the Indonesian students in the class had problems with the requirement that the assignments should contain discussion, where they felt it was not

their place, as students who should defer to their teacher's knowledge, to appear to negotiate this knowledge within the formal educational setting. Similarly, Bloor and Bloor (1991) argue that although students from many parts of the world find the British way *different* from what they expect, they find it different in many *similar* ways.

At the same time, my British students, approaching the academic discourse community of English language education from other British academic discourse communities such as literature, found it initially distasteful that their writing should be devoid, in their terms, of artistic expression – marred by headings which they felt broke the artistic flow, by hedging that to them showed lack of opinion, by the need to refer to what they had read, which to them showed that all their teachers wanted was 'regurgitation'.

The requirement by the professional-academic community of English language education that in assignments they should argue their opinions, but that these opinions should be constantly supported by very formalised references, either to their own experiences, expressed as 'case studies', or labelled 'personal observation', or to the literature, represents a finely balanced concept in writing which is extremely difficult for newcomers to the culture to learn. That there is an art in this form of academic discourse remains a mystery for the uninitiated. Many English language teachers, perhaps through adherence to principle, never succeed in appreciating this mystery; and these finer points of the discourse culture of English language education become a barrier that prevents them from entry to the 'secret society' of 'researchers' and 'writers' within the profession.

Certainly, it is where the student comes from – the already-learned cultures which she or he brings to the new learning situation – which determines, alongside individual motivational factors, the way in which the new culture is approached. The student's national culture will play a significant role here, but will not tell the whole story. The German and Indonesian students in my class came from widely different national cultures, but had been influenced by professional-academic cultures which seemed at least in part to have something in common. Indeed, I shall argue in the next chapter that it is the professional-academic culture of English language education which is eccentric, not only from the viewpoint of the developing world, but also from the viewpoint of other Western cultures. The British students had experienced a variety of other professional-academic cultures within Britain, and from these viewpoints found the culture of English language education strange. This is a further reason for arguing a BANA-TESEP rather than an East-West divide in English language education [1.2.2].

TErtiarySEcondaryPrimary = TESEP

4.5 Non-pedagogic factors

Another important factor in considering the way in which student groups behave is that there are significant aspects of their behaviour, and of the way in which they interact with classroom methodologies, which are not pedagogic in nature. They have little or nothing to do with the learning process *per se*, but rather with other social relationships within the classroom that have direct relation with the forces of role, power and status in the wider society. One example already cited [3.3], is the way in which relations between students in large Egyptian classes restore a social cohesion function lost in the process of urbanisation.

4.5.1 Transaction and interaction

In the classroom culture, smaller groups interact as they would in any other culture. The teacher represents one highly significant power base; student groups represent others. These groups may have covert, *interactional* agendas other than the *transactional* participation in lessons which provides the overt *raison d'être* for the classroom (Widdowson 1987). The implication of this is that the student group and individual groups within the student body can have identities and agendas which are independent from the agenda of the lesson:

> They will quite naturally develop their own group dynamic and this will, just as naturally, be controlled by their own norms and expectations, and these will apply not to the role of pupil at all, but to the role of peer group member.
>
> (Ibid.:87)

I have already described how the peer and reference groups of students extend outside the classroom to other student groups, and beyond to groups outside the educational environment such as the family [1.4]. Within the host institution alone, individual students will take on a multiplicity of roles as they move from membership of one classroom group for one subject to another for another subject, as they move through different out-of-class groups such as clubs or informal groups for eating, playing, waiting in corridors for classes, travelling to and from school and so on. Within one particular classroom culture, they will be members of one group with one culture for one type of activity, and another for another activity. Each pair and group organised by the teacher will have its own culture; and there will also be informal groups within the classroom with non-pedagogic functions – playing, passing messages, taunting or supporting teacher, forming relationships and so on. Every single one of these groupings will have an umbilical cord linking it with pressure-, power-, play-, and gang-groups and so on far

beyond the classroom and the host institution. Furthermore, whereas teachers may come and go, generations upon generations of students remain and transmit many of the cultural traditions, expectations and recipes for action which feed all of these groups.

Whenever a teacher attempts to organise a grouping within the class for the transactional purpose of learning, he or she immediately interferes with a powerful existing milieu. As the teacher moves from one class group to another, she or he is constantly re-entering, as outsider, an existing set of cultures, within each classroom culture, which has continued to develop, partly in reaction to the teaching styles of other teachers like her or himself. It is not simply a result of organisational logistics within many British secondary schools which keep teachers stationary within their own classrooms, while class groups move from room to room between classes; it is a way in which teachers can maintain a semblance of classroom cultural advantage, that of familiar territory. Unfortunately, new teachers are the ones who have to move also – perhaps as part of their initiation rite.

The exact nature of this situation will differ in different institutional contexts. The possible gap, or even conflict, between the transactional and interactional functions, which Widdowson (1987) argues, is likely to be greater in state education contexts, especially in secondary schools and in tertiary education in countries where education is available for all, where presence in classrooms does not necessarily correlate highly with the individual student's motivation towards transactional ends. In such cases, students may be attending for a variety of reasons other than the transactional – e.g. taking English degrees because they did not get sufficiently high secondary school scores to get into engineering or medicine, or because their families think it is good to get a degree before marrying, or taking university service English classes because it is a regulation that so many hours of English are a condition for registration on masters' courses. However, the gap will also occur in private language schools despite the existence of a business contract between institution and client: students who are sent by companies or parents may also be there for other than purely transactional purposes. But apart from these scenarios, the well-documented, complex and varied nature of motivation is such that there will always be an extra, social dimension to classroom attendance.

4.5.2 Coping strategies

As is evident in the case study of Egyptian undergraduates [4.3.1], one of the focuses of non-pedagogic student interaction is coping with classroom and host institutional conditions. Jackson (1968:10)

describes how American high school students cope with three essentially problematic aspects of school life: having to live in a crowd, constantly having their 'words and deeds evaluated by others', and the 'sharp difference in authority' between teachers and students. These can be considered universals in the lives of educational institutions, and not only in developing-world situations such as that exemplified in the Egyptian case study. Although the shortage of physical resources may be a significant factor in developing-world situations, in all situations the educational environment can be one of continuing crisis for the student.

Political factors also have an influence. Chick (in process) describes how Kwazulu students' deference to their teachers reflects the position of their community in relation to an oppressive régime. He states that 'teacher and pupil collude in preserving their dignity by hiding the fact that little or no learning is taking place', a state of affairs which in turn contributes to a high failure rate in black South African education. He analyses the discourse of a 'good' mathematics lesson, which he chooses in order to exclude the variable of interference from in-service work in English language teaching, at the same time showing that the features he describes exist across the secondary school curriculum.

The teacher dominates the lesson by nominating one student at a time to answer a question. Chick sees the volubility which characterises the teacher's mode of delivery as a 'solidarity strategy', and the taciturnity of students as a 'deference strategy'. The other side of this interactional form is the chorusing of the students, which follows the question-answer exchange. He suggests that 'chorusing gives the pupils opportunities to participate in ways that reduce the possibility of the loss of face associated with providing incorrect response to teacher elicitations or not being able to provide responses'. In this way, the overall volubility of the lesson gives the outward impression of dynamism. The remarkably rhythmic manner of teacher-pupil synchronisation contributes to the false perception that learning is going on.

so these play no role in learning?

These interactional styles therefore serve social rather than academic purposes – to prevent loss of teacher face, reducing opportunities for students to challenge teacher. The importance attached to memorisation carries the same role – providing an impression of real learning. Chick makes the important point that these lesson traits are not so much features of ethnic or tribal culture, but of educational oppression. The asymmetry which marks this interaction in Kwazulu classrooms is connected to an asymmetry which is the norm in the wider community. He argues that this interactional form is consistent with interactional styles in encounters between Zulus and white English speakers, which are

characterised by a particularly oppressive 'distribution of social power and knowledge'.

Overall, Chick makes the point which I repeat throughout, that in order to find appropriate English language teaching methodologies, it is necessary to look at 'how pervasive values, ideologies and structures in the wider society (macro context) constrain what takes place at the micro level'. The situation he describes is complex. It is important to understand that:

> When Zulus, who have low status, choose deferential politeness it is not because they like behaving deferentially, or that they 'feel' deferential, but rather because such behaviour is conventional.
>
> (Ibid.)

They stick to these interactional forms despite the academic consequences. As with the interactional forms observed in small-class cultures in Egypt [3.3] and the teaching styles of Eskimos [3.1], this Kwazulu 'safe talk' is deep and traditional. Chick argues that the only way to fathom such characteristics is through *ethnographic* observation of lessons – a point which I shall expand upon in Part C.

4.6 Summary

The following points have been made:

a) There has been much research into universals in the effective group behaviour of students. One outcome has been the establishment of a learning group ideal which provides conditions conducive to the methodological requirements of a communicative English language teaching methodology.

b) However, this research has been largely micro, and has not considered wider, macro social factors and how they may affect the implementation of the learning group ideal.

c) Research which has considered the macro context has concentrated mainly on national cultural differences of students, which overgeneralise and distort the influence of the wider social context. Much of this research is biased in its consideration of the learning group ideal as the norm. Relatively little of this research considers the host culture as the norm.

d) It is necessary to look at the macro context not just in terms of national cultural influences, but also in terms of smaller cultural influences, such as those of professional-academic and other educational cultures. Some of these may transcend national cultural factors in significant ways.

e) Observation of Egyptian university students revealed how apparently national cultural influences on student behaviour may instead be due to i) lack of educational resources, creating cooperative behaviour traits, and ii) international educational ideologies, leading to the taking of responsibility for learning.

f) The students' reaction to innovation based on the learning group ideal, while showing their ability to cope and adapt, revealed a conservatism which might be universal, and a preference for didactic, teacher-centred ideologies which might be international.

g) Overgeneralised national cultural arguments have also been applied to the difficulty which many students find in achieving appropriate discourse, especially in academic English. However, these difficulties may also be connected to learning the language of smaller dicourse communities, which may also transcend national cultural boundaries, and which present problems to native-speaker and non-native-speaker students alike.

h) There are non-pedagogic factors which may be universal in student behaviour, generated by the sharing of power and status both within the classroom, between teacher and students, and in the wider society.

4.7 Questions for discussion

1 List features of the student cultures with which you are familar under the the headings transactional and interactional.
How far can these features be connected with the culture of your country or region, or with local classroom or institutional conditions which have little to do with national culture, or with aspects of student culture which may be common to students internationally?

2 In what ways does the learning group ideal conflict with or conform to classroom cultures with which you are familiar?

5 Teacher groups

In this chapter I wish to look at the ways in which teachers contribute towards the culture of the classroom, and shall argue that, as in the case of students, this contribution reflects wider cultural forces from outside the classroom acting upon teachers as groups. Teacher groups have long been a focus for the sociology of education. English language education has much to learn from this area of study.

First I shall look at how teacher groups form professional-academic cultures which get much of their status and tradition from the subjects which they teach. I shall then look at two basic types of professional-academic culture, which Bernstein (1971) describes as *collectionist* and *integrationist*. Then, by arguing that English language education is divided between these two cultures, I shall show how this division can help us understand some of the difficulties we encounter in finding appropriate methodologies.

5.1 The power of subjects

In Chapter 2 the professional-academic cultures of teacher groups were depicted as being a major source of influence within the classroom culture [2.7]. The concept of professional-academic cultures is not new in the sociology of education; it is referred to variously as epistemic and discourse communities, vocabularies of motive and communities of practitioners (e.g. Goodson 1988; Esland 1971; Kuhn 1970). A major orientation of these cultures is the discipline or subject with which teachers are involved.

Goodson argues that subjects themselves constitute cultures which begin to determine the attitudes and allegiances of teachers from the moment they begin their training:

used to seems at risk, they hang on to their cultural values and resist. As I shall argue in Chapter 11, change can only be effective if crisis is avoided, through deep understanding of the classroom culture. Teacher agendas easily fail, and classrooms fall into irreconcilable conflict when classroom cultural forces are not understood and worked with. I shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter 9. In some cases, where classroom conditions are harsh, crisis becomes a regular state of affairs, and creates a vigorous co-operation within student groups. This co-operation can be capitalised on in the introduction of new methodologies, as I shall show in Chapter 12.

Classroom interaction represents an 'amalgam and permutation' of different and often conflicting social contexts for the different types of people involved. There is a tension between the 'internal world of the individual and the social world of the group' (Breen 1986:144).

The changeability of classroom cultures provides them with the capacity to bear the mobility of members from classroom group to group. Teachers move frequently from classroom to classroom and have to become expert at learning and being accepted by new classroom cultures; to a lesser degree students also have to become expert at moving between courses, and meeting their peers in a range of combinations in different groups.

2.7 Diversity and interconnection

I have already referred to the possibility that cultures can be any size, from very large to very small, from a national or tribal culture to a family culture [2.2]. In the concept, 'European culture', one sees even a continental culture. There can also be a system of cultures which are not mutually exclusive, with cultures overlapping, containing and being contained by other cultures. Relations between cultures can be both vertical, through hierarchies of cultures and subcultures, or horizontal, between cultures in different systems.

It is important to look at the classroom culture in terms of wider cultures. The classroom is part of a complex of interrelated and overlapping cultures of different dimensions within the host educational environment [1.4].

Figure 2 shows schematically how this culture complex may interrelate. It consists of the classroom, host institution, student, professional-academic, wider international education-related and national cultures. I have already said something about the host institution [1.4], and indeed the representation of interrelated cultures here is a deeper interpretation of the set of relationships shown in Figure 1. *Student cultures* will be dealt

with in Chapter 4. The figure shows that although these are a major contributor to the classroom, they also partly derive from outside the classroom. Their influence comes partly from the wider society, and is also carried between classrooms within the corridors of the host institution.

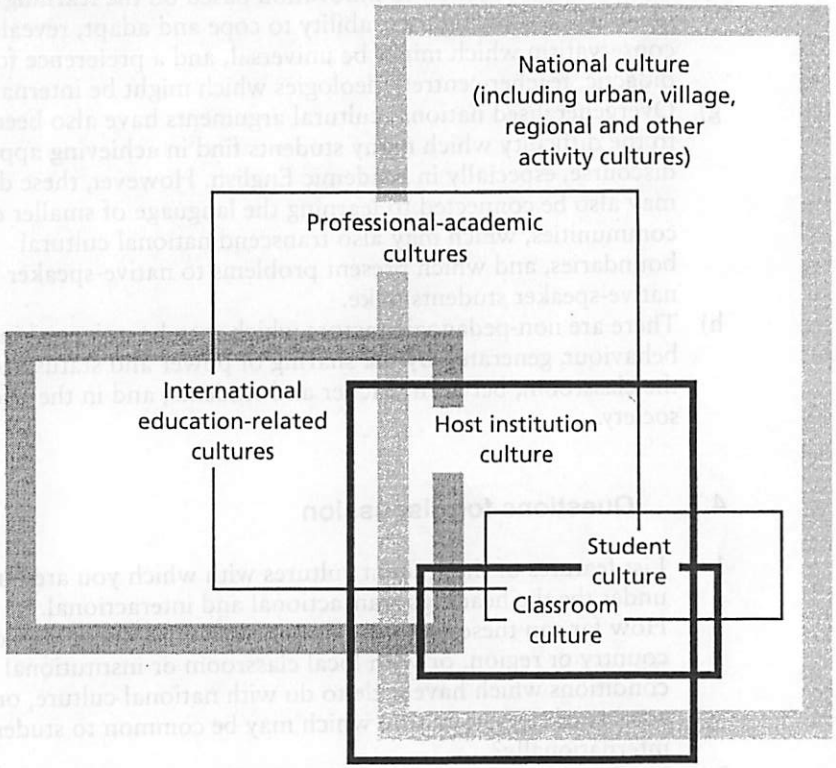

Figure 2 Host culture complex

Professional-academic cultures will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 5. It is sufficient to say here that they are the cultures connected with professional peer and reference groups, schools of academic thought and practice, professional approach etc., generated by professional associations, unions, university departments, publishers etc. It is significant that these extend beyond the boundaries of the national culture: in particular, English language teachers, in countries where English is not the mother tongue, where the subject matter, the language, is considered to be foreign, have *inter*national links which