

APPENDIX 3: DIARY TEXTS

3.1 D1

1: 12 June

2: There has been some friction today between management and teachers
3: about the selection of video materials. Management is concerned that
4: teachers do not pay enough attention to commercial concerns in their
5: choice of materials - e.g. one teacher recently showed a video of a 60
6: Minutes segment stating that Australian education was much inferior to
7: that of Taiwan. There has also been some attempt on the part of
8: management to stop teachers from using material on Pauline Hanson, as
9: they feel that reporting of her pronouncements has already done some
10: commercial damage. Teachers feel that management should not interfere
11: in their selection of materials. It seems to me that teachers rarely
12: choose material because it offers a good example of some particular
13: type of language. They are more likely to choose it because they feel
14: it may stimulate discussion, or because they are personally interested
15: in it. I think it is interesting that when I pointed out to
16: management that they themselves were still using a placement test that
17: vilified Aeroflot, someone said that they hadn't had time to replace
18: it. (It stemmed from a time when we never had Russian students.)
19:

20: I have been filling in for people on holiday until the new term
21: starts, so I've had the chance to see some classes that I don't
22: usually get to see. I've been teaching an 'intermediate' business
23: class for a week now. the school obviously wants to offer 'business
24: English' to anyone who asks for it, and probably some parents pressure
25: their children to take it. In fact, it's a bit of a farce. A lot of
26: the students are really elementary, but as there aren't any textbooks
27: for elementary business English, the lowest class is simply called
28: 'intermediate' and forced to use an intermediate book. It is way above
29: the heads of about half the class.

30:

31: Students in this class are required to do a 20 minute presentation in
32: order to graduate with a certificate in business English. From what
33: I've seen of the drafts, they would seem more likely to take 5 minutes
34: rather than 20, but I've been told that everyone must pass.

35:

36: This is part of a general problem, which is that most classes tend to
37: be over-rated - we often, for example, have intermediate classes which
38: are really elementary. There is a kind of conspiracy that when ASLPR
39: ratings are handed out they must fall within a bandwidth that has been
40: established as acceptable for each class level. Teachers who stray
41: outside this are asked to change their assessments, or simply have it
42: done for them by their supervisors. Most teachers just accept this.
43: New teachers find it puzzling, but soon realise that there is nothing
44: they can do about it.

45:

46: 13 June

47: This week students have been given forms on which to assess their
48: classes, teachers, etc. Only half the classes get them each time, and
49: none of mine did this time. It is interesting to observe the attitude
50: of teachers to these. Some say they don't want to look and others rush
51: to see if they got good reviews. Many teachers feel that they should

52: not be assessed or observed at all, so it is clear that they don't

53: view the process as one of providing a service to a customer.

54:

55: 17 June

56: Last Friday's presentations were as I had feared they would be. The

57: worse students knew themselves that they hadn't done well, as they

58: refused to look at the video of their presentations, but sat with

59: their eyes cast down. I dutifully marked them all up. The range, which

60: was actually about 1-5 was upgraded to 6.5 - 8. Some teachers justify

61: this on the grounds that the truth would be too discouraging, and the

62: students would no try any more (not that they are trying too hard

63: now).

64:

65:

66: 20 June

67: Something interesting happened to day with regard to the selection of

68: video material. I prepared a memo to be circulated to staff on the

69: condition that it was not attributed to me - I did this for the Head

70: Teacher, for whom I feel sorry because she is besieged from both sides

71: and has no-one to have a cup of tea with. Anyway, she told me that the

72: memo was to be circulated by management, but that they had decided to

73: delete one paragraph. This was one which indicated that we were

74: currently experiencing a downturn in business, mentioned in connection

75: with the inadvisability of bad-mouthing Australian education to those

76: who were in the process of buying some of it.

77:

78: I thought this was particularly interesting as it revealed the fact

79: that management is aware of the tension between the teachers'

80: perception of their role and their view of management with its eye on

81: the bottom line. This might seem obvious, but sometimes it becomes

82: obscured in our institution where there is such verbal stress put on

83: quality control.

84:

85: I believe that a management person even said: "We should take that out

86: - we don't want them to think that we only care about the bottom

87: line." Of course, that is precisely the case. I feel that there is

88: little possibility that they are motivated by - say - a desire to

89: further international relations. It is rather charming, though, like a

90: fox pretending to be a chicken with the aid of a few glued- on

91: feathers and as cardboard beak. I suppose I find it charming because

92: it is so little likely to fool anyone.

93:

94: On another topic - I was glad to see the end of my 'fill-in' class

95: today. Poor souls, it is hard for elementary students to be dragged

96: through the briar bush of Business Objectives. This is one of the

97: worst examples I have seen of the phenomenon of the class which has to

98: be treated as if its members were at a much higher level than they

99: actually are. When it gets this extreme it seems obvious to me that it

100: must be counterproductive even from the commercial point of view.

101: However much the material is simplified, it still remains beyond most

102: of them, and they feel cowed and beaten by it.

103:

104: It should certainly be possible to write a business course for

105: elementary students which used business vocabulary and business

106: contexts. But there would be little incentive for the school to do it

107: as the number of students is so low. These students strongly resisted
 108: the advice I gave them, and which I am sure they have also received
 109: from others, to go into a General English stream. They thus connive at
 110: the their own misery.
 111:
 112: June 22
 113: re low level business students mentioned in the last entry. Their only
 114: hope would be to strike a teacher so dedicated that he/she would spend
 115: a lot of their free time writing a course. This is very unlikely to
 116: happen as most of the teachers are so inexperienced that they don't
 117: realise that there is anything wrong. Of course, that is a commercial
 118: decision too. No school could afford to have a majority of very
 119: experienced teachers. But I wonder if the balance isn't a bit too far
 120: the other way in our case. And of course there is the strange
 121: phenomenon that the more experienced the teacher, the less likely they
 122: are to actually teach. For nine staff members who might be regarded as
 123: senior - they have an MA or RSA Diploma, or have just been teaching
 124: for a long time -- the average weekly workload in the classroom is one
 125: and a half days. There are four who do not teach at all.
 126:
 127: While often telling people how important teaching standards are, most
 128: of these people would rather have their wisdom teeth drawn than go
 129: into the classroom. Since management is happy to countenance this, it
 130: must mean that they believe that these people contribute more to the
 131: well-being of the company by not teaching.
 132:
 133: Not teaching is a sign of status, and sometimes you here people say
 134: 'only a teacher'. When you look at the less-experienced and therefore
 135: cheaper teachers that are hired, there are certain characteristics
 136: that emerge. These teachers tend, for example, to be younger and
 137: better-looking than the run of the population. I would guess at a mean
 138: age of approximately 26. None of them have any visible physical
 139: defect, or are overweight. Very few of them even wear glasses. None
 140: are of Asian racial origin, This reminds me of the ads I used to see
 141: in the Japan Times for 'young, blond female English teacher,
 142: attractive and under 28'. Having seen groups of teachers from AMES,
 143: TAFE or even some other private schools, it does not seem to me that
 144: the characteristics predominating here reflect the mix of teachers as
 145: a whole. Schools associated with universities seem to have a more
 146: representative mix but it may be that being associated with a
 147: university is a strong enough selling point in itself without the need
 148: to focus on other points, including this, the 'school as sexual shop
 149: window' factor.
 150:
 151: In our school, the few teachers who are older invariably teach on
 152: migrant classes - I am the only exception - and in those classes the
 153: salesmanship element is not present. Management would be quick to
 154: condemn the Japan Times type of advertising, but I think that they
 155: must be selecting with similar characteristics themselves. They would
 156: be loathe to admit it, but they know that , for example, Japanese girl
 157: students often swoon over handsome young male teachers, and that this
 158: factor would affect their assessments of the school.
 159:
 160: As far as teaching standards are concerned, there is little interest
 161: in them until there is a complaint, and then there is a great deal of

162: scuttling about and allocation of blame. This happened the other day
163: when a very inexperienced teacher was rostered to teach an elective
164: class on English and Tourism (General English students have these
165: electives one day a week - such things as IELTS Preparation, or
166: Australian Studies or Drama), and students complained about the number
167: of excursions she took them on. She had not been given any course
168: outline for the elective and was not capable of organising one for
169: herself. Nor should she have been expected to be. She had simply been
170: thrown in. No-one considered the matter until the complaint was made,
171: and then she was blamed because she could not swim.

172:

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

182:

183: June 24

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

196:

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

205:

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

210:

211: Yesterday I was telephoned at home and told that I would not be
212: teaching on General English in the upcoming term, but on EAP. I felt
213: myself curiously unwilling to do this, and, on analysing my feelings,
214: I decided that this must be because I do not want to come too close
215: to the nasty picture of what is happening to Australian education.

216:

217: I have seen some of the writing produced by students in the EAP
 218: stream, examples which have been regarded as good, and I thought they
 219: were terrible. I feel that students wishing to enter university in any
 220: discipline should have to pass HSC English (I find IELTS a very poor
 221: substitute), but I know this would reduce the numbers to almost zero.
 222: I know that there is enormous pressure on academics to pass all
 223: full-fee-paying students, and I have personally heard parents in
 224: Taiwan say of their offspring who have failed to gain a place in a
 225: university there : "Never mind, we'll send him/her to Australia."
 226:
 227: Sorry if I seem to be wandering off the point. But there is a
 228: connection, because EAP is the first step on the escalator of lies, I
 229: think. I know it's there, but I'd prefer to avoid dealing with it
 230: personally. This marketing of Australian education is becoming such a
 231: big industry now that it's scary. I asked the teacher who is in charge
 232: of the EAP program what has happened to the system which was devised
 233: with one of the universities whereby our students could bypass the
 234: IELTS exam by completing a written assignment and gaining a certain
 235: mark on our placement test. He said that no-one had entered university
 236: by this method recently, but that it was still used as a marketing
 237: point.
 238:
 239: JUNE 25
 240: The memo that I mentioned earlier on selection of materials was
 241: distributed today. I was in a uniquely advantageous situation to get
 242: feedback on it, since no-one knew I had written it. I must say that I
 243: was surprised at the vehemence of the opposition to it. A lot of
 244: people regarded it as censorship; since it asked them to take various
 245: factors into account when they choose material rather than asking them
 246: not to use anything in particular, I don't think that that was
 247: reasonable comment. Others wanted to react by taking everything to
 248: extremes - coming up with absurd suggestions about what they would
 249: have to avoid if they didn't want to offend anyone.
 250:
 251: One person raised the matter of whaling and the Japanese - she said
 252: that Japanese should be told that this was wrong and that she saw
 253: nothing wrong with telling them. I said that if she felt this way,
 254: probably the best thing she could do would be to write to the Japanese
 255: Embassy, or to join some suitable organisation, rather than using her
 256: classroom as a pulpit - I said it a bit more tactfully than that - but
 257: I don't think she agreed.
 258:
 259: One of the teachers who works with migrant classes took extreme
 260: offence at the description of the school as a business which was
 261: selling a product. I know him, and he is a nice boy who is dedicated
 262: to his work, and who has been making intelligent efforts to sell
 263: migrant classes to the ethnic community. He has, for example, been to
 264: visit the Islamic Council and a Jewish organisation and some other
 265: groups, trying to get ready for the withdrawal of the CES from its
 266: role of provider of education services. He should therefore be aware
 267: of the fact that money changes hands, but he was very upset. He seemed
 268: to equate the word 'product' with something inherently shonky. But
 269: then he is very left-wing.
 270:
 271: From my point of view, the memo said, in essence try not to offend

272: people don't use materials which say that Australian education is
 273: useless think before you give Pauline Hanson too much publicity. This
 274: does not seem too radical to me. (I did, though, try to make the memo
 275: a little stronger than just a suggestion.) I think that the reason
 276: must be that the teachers are so anti-management that any edict issued
 277: will be regarded with deep suspicion and automatically regarded as
 278: anti-teacher. This is a decision which management have brought upon
 279: themselves.
 280:
 281: There is also the point that teachers do not have very much power, and
 282: so perhaps they are determined to protect the last bastion of their
 283: freedom, the freedom to choose materials. Perhaps they can also gain
 284: some pleasure and some sense of power and worth if they can harangue
 285: the class about whatever it is that they are personally on about. I
 286: have felt this myself, but I recognise it for what it is. I believe
 287: there is also an element of punishment and revenge in the desire to
 288: tell the customers, who are sometimes far from fun, that their eating
 289: habits are disgusting and their politics suspect.
 290:
 291: Some people mistake their role entirely, and see themselves as
 292: something else. I remember a teacher years ago who went into the
 293: classroom and gave a lesson on avoiding AIDS which included unrolling
 294: condoms onto her fingers. Lessons may also serve as therapy - for
 295: example the teacher whose lover was dying of AIDS who gave lesson
 296: after lesson on the disease. So we have teaching as social work and
 297: teaching as therapy for the teacher.
 298:
 299: I think ESL teaching is a kind of refuge for the desperate and
 300: battered, and this adds to the variety of strange ways in which
 301: teachers see themselves. Certainly, language rarely seems to come to
 302: the foreground. The majority of teachers at my organisation have
 303: little interest in language and see nothing strange in the fact that
 304: they cannot spell fairly simple words or explain basic grammar points.
 305:
 306: I am due to give a major inservice in a couple of days on the topic
 307: of cultural sensitivity, so we will see how it goes - I expect there
 308: will be controversy, so that will be something to look forward to.
 309:
 310: JUNE 28
 311: The inservice was yesterday, and I think it raised some interesting
 312: points from the point of view of this diary. Quite a few teachers
 313: seemed to think that it was of little use to try to accommodate
 314: students' cultural expectations, and that ss should simply do as the
 315: Romans do. There were a few cries of 'I can't be any different to
 316: what I am' and 'How can I be expected to change my personality?'
 317: There was little perception of the teacher as a professional provider
 318: of a service.
 319:
 320: All in all, there seemed to be little realisation that we are
 321: providing a service to a customer. One man said that this was a new
 322: concept for him and he was happy with it, and felt that it made him
 323: more secure, because he could realise clearly what was the nature of
 324: his work. Such pragmatism is rare. Inexperienced teachers who have
 325: done a short course in one method of language teaching cannot be
 326: expected, of course, to be very flexible in their approach.

327:

328: The most recent of my musings have made me realise that we are not
329: simply looking at a situation where management espouses commercial
330: considerations and teachers espouse pedagogical ones, with the former
331: being the black hats and the latter the white ones. There is
332: considerable variety among the teachers when it comes to recognising
333: exactly what they do. The role of the teacher may be perceived in many
334: different ways. There is also the division between that part of
335: management which is concerned with status and the part whose principal
336: concern is profit.

337:

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

350:

351: JULY 5

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

363:

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

371:

372: Management does not seem to realise that there is any connection
373: between hiring the cheapest teachers possible and their having little
374: time left over to attend inservices.

375:

376: JULY 7

377: I was thinking today that if I were asked to choose the most common
378: area of conflict between pedagogical and financial concerns in this
379: school it would be the placement of students in classes. It is almost
380: impossible to demote a student, even if they have been seriously
381: misplaced in the first instance, and the labels on the classes have

382: very little to do with the students in them. Most 'advanced' students
383: are in fact intermediate, and some of them are closer to
384: pre-intermediate. Only the lowest levels are accurately.
385:
386:
387:

3.2 D2

1: Week One

2: Monday 10 November 1997

3: [Notes made in the afternoon and typed up at night]

4: Today was the first day of a new course and for the first time in

5: almost a year I didn't have to do classroom teaching, instead I was

6: helping induct the new students. It gave me a new perspective or

7: reminded me of the old perspective seeing new students come in rather

8: than myself just being non-stop on the teaching conveyor belt.

9:

10: One student had just done six months at X, a school across the road

11: and had reached their intermediate level but her English was more like

12: mild elementary. She wants to do IELTS next month and go to uni next

13: year but she'd be lucky to get a score of 5.0. So I faced the old

14: dilemma of not wanting to discourage her but also not wanting to give

15: her false hopes. She may be one of those people who are hopeless at

16: learning a foreign language. I ascertained that she is aware that it

17: is a very hard exam and she seems to be a person who studies hard,

18: perhaps with bad methods. At least she's not going to be in my class.

19: It may be better to counsel her in a couple of weeks or after she's

20: sat her IELTS test, assuming that she will not reach the proficiency

21: level she will need, to do some course at a business or other college

22: where she can get away from learning English and get into studying

23: something which may be of use to her and through which her English may

24: improve. It's a situation where I think there's not much that can be

25: done at the moment. This is a common situation.

26:

27: Tuesday 11 November 1997

28: [Notes made in the afternoon and typed up on the following night]

29: At lunchtime the DoS told me that a student I was to have had in my

30: class starting that afternoon had transferred to another class. She

31: told me that he had said he wanted to change class because I am rude

32: to Indonesian students [he is Indonesian], citing as an example that I

33: had called him "the cigarette man". I had not known until that moment

34: that this student did not like me or had taken my joke badly. I had

35: never had him as a student before and knew him only through other

36: Indonesian students. When the DoS told me what he'd said I felt that

37: I needed to explain to her what it was about, which I immediately did,

38: partly to clear my name, even though she had not told me it in any

39: censoring tone and she was not making a big thing of it. What had

40: happened was that a few weeks previously a Korean student gave me two

41: packets of Indonesian cigarettes which the Indonesian guy had given

42: her and then the next day she gave me two more packets which were from

43: him. She said he had given packets to other students as well after

44: returning from a holiday in Indonesia. That's why I called him the

45: cigarette man. After the DoS told me about it I felt bad, as teachers

46: tend to do when any student makes a negative comment about them or

47: their teaching. It is a problem which arises because we deal with

48: humans and it is hard not to take things personally. It was lunchtime

49: and I felt bad about it and thought to myself that I didn't want to

50: run into him but on the other hand felt like confronting him with it

51: to explain that I had not meant it in any bad way.

52:

53: Then I thought it's probably best to ignore it and thought that he is

54: perhaps just thin-skinned. As a general point I felt that I should be
55: careful to know a student better before making such a comment to them.
56: It occurred to me that for him it may have been an insulting term
57: because in Indonesia young guys who go around on the street selling
58: cigarettes have low status. During lunch I told another teacher about
59: what had happened because I find that helps when there is any such
60: problem at work and I got the expression of solidarity which I had
61: been expecting and hoping for. Just to tell the story/complaint helps
62: and other teachers have usually experienced something similar and
63: offer a sympathetic ear. I have had some other quite similar
64: experiences of students taking things I said the wrong way in the
65: past. In part they do not recognise that Australians make fun of
66: someone as a gesture of friendliness. It is easy to forget as a
67: teacher what an impact our words can have on students, perhaps more so
68: students from Asian than Western countries. After talking with the
69: other teacher I did not think of it again until writing this up, so it
70: wasn't a really serious matter.

71:

72: Wednesday 12 November 1997 Nothing for today.

73:

74: Thursday 13 November 1997

75: [Notes made in the afternoon and typed up on 17 November]

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

99:

100: Friday 14 November 1997

101: [Notes made in the afternoon and typed up on 17 November]

102: In the morning EAP class we did a video on Australian kids going into
103: uni. There was about 10 ten minutes left and I found an old
104: promotional video sitting on the machine, so I put it on for all of us
105: to watch together. It was above all a laugh for all of us. It was
106: about seven years old and most of the staff who appeared in it are now
107: elsewhere, particularly at [name of college]. There was the usual corny
108: promotional music and way of presentation of a packet experience

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

164: some of which is not always kept well, so that it may appear students
 165: did not attend an activity beyond the classroom which they did in fact
 166: attend. I'm usually quite careful with it but today I just filled in
 167: the spaces for those students who I felt would have attended but who,
 168: according to the record had not been there, and when I asked them
 169: later they said they had in fact done so. It's another conflict
 170: between bureaucratic rules (in this case by the Department of
 171: Immigration) and a teacher's desire to do well by students who make a
 172: serious effort at study.
 173:
 174: Something else which happened today was that a student who is in the
 175: other EAP class came to me and said he wanted to change over into my
 176: morning class. He used to be in a class of mine and it was flattering
 177: for me that he wanted to come back for more. I told him the procedure
 178: -- the necessity to speak to his present teacher first then to a
 179: senior teacher or the DoS -- and that he could tell them it's fine by
 180: me if he comes into my class. I didn't ask him why he wanted to
 181: change class because I assumed he was not satisfied with the other
 182: teacher and, because of my own past negative experiences, I don't like
 183: other teachers being subjected to that. There are similarities with
 184: the "cigarette man" incident almost a fortnight ago, but this time in
 185: reverse.
 186:
 187: I'm naturally always happy when students like being in my class and I
 188: want the DoS to know it too, particularly as on a few occasions over
 189: the past few years she and her predecessor "had words" with me
 190: regarding students who didn't like me or my teaching and I was put
 191: through the wringer of lesson observations to see whether I was up to
 192: scratch or not. This is a conflict due to the "quality control" of
 193: teaching by the management. The trouble is that students become
 194: "clients" who can damage a person's employment prospects and
 195: management can use it to intimidate or get rid of a teacher they no
 196: longer want, for whatever reason. We deal with hundreds of students,
 197: but naturally like humans everywhere they don't to the boss to say
 198: something positive, but to complain. I really dislike the regular
 199: student evaluation system here and the way it is dealt with so that
 200: you often do not even hear about it if you have positive appraisals,
 201: but it makes your life hell if a couple of students, for whatever
 202: reason, complain. It's really out of proportion if we are expected to
 203: please almost all of the people all of the time. No further entries
 204: made until the end of week four.
 205:
 206: Week Four Friday 5 December 1997
 207: [Notes made on that day and typed up on 9 December]
 208: Some other courses finished today, though not my courses, and I got a
 209: pang of the feeling I get sometimes of the transitory nature of EFL.
 210: The teachers have a big turnover, both voluntary and involuntary, and
 211: the students turn over at an even faster rate. When I first started
 212: teaching in Sydney ten years ago, the visa regulations meant that
 213: students signed on for much longer courses and there was more a sense
 214: of continuity, though even then too there was a feeling of sadness at
 215: the end of a course. It was rare that I was actually sad that I would
 216: not be seeing certain individual students any more, rather it is an
 217: existential sadness at the concrete manifestation of life moving on,
 218: leaving a bit of an empty feeling. With five-week courses it is hard

219: to notice any great improvement in individuals' English proficiency
220: anyway, but there is something Sysophian about the constant treadmill
221: of courses, something both tiring (I'm sick of doing EAP and once more
222: will ask to be given a temporary break from it) and pointless, an
223: asking of myself where I am going with my life. School teachers or
224: Foundation Studies teachers are said to get a greater sense of
225: achievement through their longer association with students or groups
226: of students, though I would much prefer to be in ELICOS than in the
227: high school system.
228:
229: That's all for the diary, so I'll add a couple of points which did not
230: occur in the four-week period.
231:
232: I have noticed several times that I prefer having Asian to European
233: students and feel far more relaxed with the former. I think one
234: reason for this is because the whites tend to be greater complainers
235: and less respectful of teachers and this puts me on my guard. Though
236: I have more in common with the Euros culturally, many of them appear
237: to me as spoiled chewing-gum-chewing self-absorbed children of excess
238: consumption. Fortunately I have had few European students in the last
239: few years, a consequence of concentrating on EAP/IELTS and avoiding
240: Cambridge preparation courses.
241:
242: As the Cambridge courses finished last Friday, a number of teachers
243: didn't have their contracts extended. If I took holidays now or in
244: January, which I don't want to do, someone would have a bit more work.
245: Plus, with the recent economic events in Asian countries, my vague
246: plans to move workplaces have been put on hold for a while. To go
247: part time would solve many problems, but I doubt whether they'll let
248: me.
249:

3.3 D3

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

53: ask them to leave a speak outside in their language - on this occasion
 54: it was some oh so cool French students who each time I asked them to
 55: leave, apologised profoundly but then continued to rave on in French.
 56: After days of this I really lost my patience and blew up but I wonder
 57: if this is necessary - I was feeling pressured that week - I often
 58: feel as though I dragged the student off the street, held a gun to
 59: their head and said 'learn English' - this continues to fascinate me.
 60:
 61: I'm also constantly aware of disinterested eyebrow raising students
 62: who I want to slap across the face! HARD
 63:
 64: Another problem is the disinterested student - the moaner, the
 65: sleeper, the victim. How effectively does one handle them when you
 66: have to see them everyday? The perfect formula stills eludes me.
 67:
 68: I suppose its also important to consider the classes you hate -
 69: whether it be the topics or the students. Is it the case of a smile
 70: all day? (I sound negative but there are classes I love)
 71:
 72: I meant to mention the over enthusiastic student who always dominates
 73: - a difficult job to contain. Usually I have a private chat and that
 74: works (but not this month). Speaking of love what are the boundaries
 75: here with professionalism? I know many teachers who have had affairs
 76: with students. How do you teach effectively if there's someone
 77: gorgeous in your class. I know sometimes I end up talking or teaching
 78: just to them. One must remain focused.
 79:
 80: I've had a few hassles with crushes from Japanese girls - some have
 81: been a bit like fatal attraction - midnight phone calls (silly move to
 82: give out your number), stalking etc.
 83:
 84: I'm not joking about this it's been a real pain. I've stopped
 85: socialising with students due to this and the fact that it can take
 86: over your whole life!
 87:
 88: I also find it difficult to cope with private questions or
 89: bombardments for the class. I always try to explain on day 1
 90: inappropriate questions but as the relationship grows its difficult to
 91: contain. I know many teachers who've had to deal with sexual
 92: harassment or homophobia. Not fun and I've seen colleagues in tears
 93: from time to time. These issues are hard culturally and I almost had
 94: students killing each other in my class this week about different
 95: issues. We have cultural awareness packages today which are great but
 96: I don't think we still do enough.
 97:
 98: I think one issue that bothers me is the lack of preparation time -
 99: we're meant to do a million things with no time. Magicians - maybe!
 100: The casualisation of the industry continues to encourage
 101: disempowerment. Recently we've received some new computers and I know
 102: we'll have a few inservice lectures about them but that's it. I feel
 103: to really know the computers books etc, we need more time to look them
 104: over - otherwise they remain underutilised.
 105:
 106: I've found recently teachers are expected to do more and more in their
 107: spare time - not prep time - if you enquire about something management

108: will say - Oh yes of course you're welcome to look at the new package
 109: thoroughly - on your own time!! Many times I feel as though I don't
 110: know the functions of the computer or lab well enough and I feel that
 111: the students deserve for me to know it fully. I don't like to bluff my
 112: way through but I also don't like spending more time then necessary at
 113: my job without being paid for it. It's a dilemma and I watch many
 114: teachers do hours and hours extra without a cent.
 115:
 116: Now I suppose I want to think about over-preparedness. I watched a
 117: colleague cut and paste for hours to make something minimally better.
 118: I think time utilisation is not fully exploited in teacher training
 119: and I don't mean lesson planning I mean changing, rewriting things
 120: that are 80% Ok and you can work around it without a huge hassle. I
 121: often get teachers asking me how I get away with so little preparation
 122: - I firmly believe that they are wasting their time joining the cut
 123: and paste phenomenon which has swept our industry! I also recently had
 124: a younger teacher ask me about 'warmers' which I only use occasionally
 125: - and she was shocked by this - I often don't use them because I find
 126: then unnecessary with adults and especially in higher levels (I'm
 127: aware some are fantastic).
 128:
 129: I'm not articulating myself very well at present but I think I'm think
 130: I'm trying to say that I don't like seeing a class run like a primary
 131: school, or for that matter I don't like my place of employment being
 132: run like a primary school. I hope you can decipher my meaning - its
 133: just recently I've been complaining more and more about this issue and
 134: more and more students have complained to me about it as well.
 135:
 136: I think it's time to mention the difficulties of large classes - with
 137: particular reference to the varying levels within each class. Usually
 138: I teach advanced classes but recently I've been teaching beginners. I
 139: think the biggest problem that I've faced is that I've noticed that I
 140: tend to ignore or forget about some quiet students (in my class of
 141: 17). Even though I remind students I find the more outgoing students
 142: continue to gain my attention. I also have an occasion given up trying
 143: to explain something to a student who is having extreme difficulties
 144: understanding - I know its bad but due to time constraints I often
 145: just smile and move on leaving the student somewhat in limbo. It's
 146: that dreaded time factor coming into play again!
 147:
 148: I have also developed a bad habit of trying to please students who are
 149: really 'negative' in their attitude or behaviour. It really annoys me
 150: that I focus so much on them and not on the students who really want
 151: to learn and who work really hard. I've spoken to my colleagues and
 152: they all say the same thing that when someone is being really negative
 153: it gains their attention and they try to please that student often at
 154: the expense of the others.
 155:
 156: On thing I also wanted to talk about is the problems that arise when
 157: students opinions radically differ from you won eg. you will die in
 158: hell because you don't go to church every Sunday.
 159:
 160: I often find myself getting rather irritated and pissed off at the
 161: narrow mindedness or often downright racistness (new word - poetic
 162: license?) or some of the students. I find that often this drives me to

163: despair.
 164:
 165: Sometimes I argue but nowadays I just say something along the lines of
 166: - well that's your opinion, not everyone agrees etc. Its hard because
 167: I'm sure you can imagine what I really want to say. How much sexism,
 168: racism, etc should we except? How imparted are we expected to be
 169: whilst maintaining our own dignity? Again we're back to the grey areas
 170: of this job and I don't imagine for one second that there's any simple
 171: answer.
 172:
 173: I don't fall to pieces when this happens but often I feel that I'm
 174: selling my beliefs short and I don't feel comfortable with that. I
 175: suppose it's not just an issue in this industry but it is one that we
 176: face repeatedly.
 177:
 178: The issue of students thinking that it is really cool or shocking to
 179: swear in class came up again last week. It is usually my policy to
 180: teach taboo words but often some students like to overuse the words
 181: for their 'shock value'. I often ask them if they would use the same
 182: language in their country and of course they reply that they wouldn't
 183: but in the next breath they continue with the 'fucks'.
 184:
 185: We had a discussion last week regarding 'testing' and I feel that too
 186: many teachers are catering the test for their students to achieve
 187: great results. I do not advocate an unfair test and am well aware of
 188: the pitfalls of assessment but without an accurate measure of ability
 189: our classes often become unworkable. Some teachers seem to think a
 190: mark of 60% is a fail or in someway a representation of their own
 191: failure to 'teach'. Seems we have so many students with a pass rate of
 192: 80 - 90% who can't speak.
 193:
 194: I was speaking to a colleague who teaches at another institution and
 195: we spoke about the problems of some teachers being too afraid to take
 196: sick leave because of the reaction from management. She told me how
 197: inconvenient it was for her to be ill! (Inconvenient for her as well I
 198: suppose).
 199:
 200: I also know some teachers who work on through a cold for flu because
 201: they don't want to be a 'bother' to their DOS. I think it's
 202: unimportant that trainee teachers are carefully made aware of their
 203: rights - not necessarily from the union - but from the trainers. I
 204: suppose it comes back to a point I made earlier about people
 205: being/feeling rather insecure about their jobs and not wanting to rock
 206: the boat - although the denial of sickleave through what is paramount
 207: to emotional blackmail is completely unacceptable.
 208:
 209: I think my last point should be to emphasise the need for teachers to
 210: get together - not necessarily for an inservice as such but for an
 211: informal meeting to be given the opportunity to discuss resources,
 212: hints, ideas and problems. I think idea sharing pools were really well
 213: at my place of employment and should be encouraged in all
 214: institutions. These are not only unavailable for new teachers but also
 215: for those who have more experience.
 216:
 217: I think this diary has been great therapy for me and perhaps the idea

218: of a diary for new teachers is not such a bad one - as long as it
219: doesn't become too time consuming. I hope you find my thoughts, moans
220: and groans useful and I wish you luck in the future with your work.
221:

3.4 D4

1: 31/12, written 1/1

2:

3: At the end of a working day we were asked to say back for a special
4: announcement. 'Course programs' were distributed for each level. We
5: were to peruse them and discuss at the next staff meeting. It was not
6: long before I felt that these programs were very odd indeed and even
7: confused some teachers. They will eventually replace the present
8: lesson plan record in which teachers record what was taught every
9: session. The new program consists of units (1 unit per week) divided
10: into subgroups - structures are to be tick off when taught and dated.
11: Initially one would think this was an efficient way streamlining the
12: school's teaching program. It is actually an ill-informed move which
13: seems to have no guiding principles/methodology in mind. I am familiar
14: with 2 basic systems: 1) a course based largely on a coursebook, with
15: supplementary activities 2) a curriculum - fully-referenced which
16: lists a range of structures, lexis and skills which should ideally be
17: covered each week. Each has their advantages and pitfalls. This 'new'
18: program seemed an unsatisfactory mix of both and caused me to feel
19: distinctly uneasy about whether whoever had designed this program knew
20: what they were doing. My program for Pre-int level was loosely based
21: on the Headway Pre-int book yet it was also to be used by teachers who
22: used a different book 'Language in Use' for which no references were
23: given. Unit's are divided into the trad. Categories 1) structures and
24: functions 2) themes and vocabulary 3) speaking and listening
25: activities 4) reading and writing 5) additional resources used.
26: Despite the new direction the program is taking there is little
27: acknowledgement of this ie structure is all important and used to
28: teach functions and this is supplemented by themes and vocab - I
29: wondered what all this was leading to and still have to decide how I
30: will phrase my comments. I had a long discussion with another teacher
31: who, despite many years of experience, felt totally confused by this
32: document. It takes the headings of the coursebooks as its aim - yet
33: presents as an independent program - or is it a syllabus. My sneaking
34: suspicion is that it will be used as a way of checking that teachers
35: are covering the necessary material. Instructions such as 'Please
36: insert the date each structure was taught' give me a good idea of what
37: the designer of the form thinks language teaching/learning is all
38: about. I would heartily disagree with many of the assumptions made and
39: herein is my dilemma. I suspect that 'streamlining and controlling'
40: the final product is the goal here. I feel that many new things
41: /procedures are about to be/are being introduced into this particular
42: school.

43:

44: In addition, another form was produced - titled Original Teaching
45: Activity; 'you will produce four of these a module' (5 weeks) in which
46: an activity, its aims and procedures were to be described. I wondered
47: if this was really for the use of all the teachers or whether it was
48: more important that this would eventually be collated and printed in a
49: booklet under the school's name (mentioned twice).

50:

51: Many of these recent innovations do not yet seem to have their origins
52: in teaching staff but come down from above - admin and management. It
53: seems like teachers' lives are going to have to be adjusted in order

54: to fill in with the needs of the school.

55:

56: I can already predict that it is the teachers who are more experienced

57: and have further qualifications who quietly question the validity,

58: necessity and wisdom of these new pieces of paper. The real dilemma

59: will come when we are asked to comment at a staff meeting. The newest

60: teachers will happily agree to anything , older ones will murmur, some

61: will speak up and others will not because it would cause too much

62: trouble - it's easier to keep quiet and you will at least keep your

63: job!

64:

65: (Dates same as above)

66: I have a new 'small' Pre-int class of 8 students. The class is a good

67: one and as most are good Elementary level I'd rather it didn't grow. I

68: was told that classes were starting small and my class could grow to

69: 16 - many to be added next week. The pressures of continuous enrolment

70: and large class size mean I won't be able to

71: devote sufficient attention to slower and weaker students but know

72: from previous experience that objections to large class sizes will be

73: met by looks of disapproval from management. I will somehow be at

74: fault for causing trouble, rocking the boat. We all know that

75: financial concerns are uppermost - that we can never have 2 classes of

76: 8 when there could be a class of 16. I These consideration also affect

77: placement decisions - students will be moved up or down so that class

78: sizes are neat and may be moved up because they've already 'done the

79: book' of a certain class. Objections will be met with stony looks.

80:

81: 2/1, written 2/1

82: I'm writing about this incident particularly because it is recurrent

83: in a multilingual teaching situation - 2 of which I have experienced

84: (Britain and Australia) where s's live with a host family in order to

85: improve their English. Today they talked about /reviewed their new

86: living situations. There is often dissatisfaction - today P said she

87: was moving into a flat because she was unhappy - had requested

88: non-smoking and no animals) got smoking and animals and was living in

89: a 3m x 3m room in bunk beds which was very noisy - room and board cost

90: \$170 a week - they asked me if I thought it was cheap or expensive,

91: how much bills were etc, which parts of Sydney were cheap to live in.

92: This situation happens time and time again. As a teacher I know I'm

93: supposed to send them to the people who organise homestay, not join in

94: with and support their criticisms - I don't always do this -

95: sometimes we know that some people take s's for financial reasons

96: only, provide poor conditions and little interaction, others are

97: mansions with friendly welcoming Australians.

98:

99: I think this situation comes about because (esp. for lower level

100: students with limited communication skills in English) their teacher

101: is the one person they see on a daily basis, talk to and trust . I am

102: torn between my roles as school representative one ought to defend the

103: product but over this aspect I have no control but I learn a lot

104: about similar dilemmas occurred when a student showed me photos she

105: had of a filthy bathroom in her homestay and asked 'Is this normal?' I

106: had to say that I thought it was disgusting but do not forget being

107: told at a recent meeting by the marketing manager that it didn't help

108: things when we sided with students against management on issues

109: concerning student welfare, school activities, visas, attendance , fee
 110: payment and changing classes and anything else one could imagine. It
 111: seems that the teacher is required to play a silent mindless role
 112: whilst at the same time being responsible for everything that happens
 113: in the classroom every day of the week. Connected to the above - yet
 114: another new form introduced - teachers are to note any problems they
 115: encounter and forward this to Senior Teacher/Admin immediately. This
 116: is to catch/anticipate problems to avoid complaints from agents months
 117: later. I feel like I'm expected to be part educator, part marketing
 118: manager. What infuriates me is that that is no avenue /channel for
 119: teachers' problems/complaints or dissatisfaction . Their resolution
 120: brings little financial advantage or satisfaction and allowing them to
 121: be aired would mean a total rethinking of the way the school was
 122: organised. Student grievances are to immediately noted, passed on and
 123: dealt with whilst some teachers are quietly discontented. Where is the
 124: teachers' memo/suggestion box?
 125:
 126: 3/1, written 4/1
 127: A memo from the DOS about creating a system for teacher development -
 128: to help improve existing skills and techniques, increase knowledge and
 129: acquire new skills. I feel that this is a very good idea but clearly
 130: hope I will be working somewhere else but the time it is implemented.
 131: The DOS and Head Teacher have, to my knowledge, no further
 132: qualification in TESOL, Applied Linguistics (eg an MA or RSA Dip) and
 133: know less than I do about recent issues and directions in
 134: teaching/linguistics. I not only feel compromised professionally but
 135: insulted. The owner of the school has not bothered to employ people
 136: with the relevant and necessary qualifications. I have worked for a
 137: number of schools where observations were conducted on a regular
 138: basis. Like everybody I hate being observed , but welcome feedback and
 139: useful advice from those better qualified than myself, I'm not
 140: referring to teacher training. It is almost embarrassing that we will
 141: be observed by someone who is not qualified in the field. 'Excellence
 142: in language teaching' ie 'the pursuit of excellence' is one the
 143: school's aims and/or mottos and it is still unclear to me what this
 144: really is. Does this mean good results in Cambridge Exams using the
 145: latest methodology, sending students away happy, pushing students
 146: quickly up through the school. I suspect that all of this will not be
 147: done well at all , that simplistic ideas about teaching and learning
 148: languages will be suggested and the old p.p.p. line will be pushed. My
 149: dilemma here is not one of differing methodologies but rather
 150: introducing teacher development because it is an important condition
 151: of being affiliated to X, the biggest chain of private ELT colleges in
 152: the world. Interestingly teacher development in itself is not enough
 153: of a reason we are being encouraged to 'help realise the company
 154: goal'! The word company makes me feel like a stockbroker not a teacher
 155: and this isn't the 1st time I've been involved in teacher development
 156: because we must be seen to be doing it.
 157:
 158: 7/1, written 7/7
 159: My class increased in size from 6-12 and we were moved, ironically, to
 160: a smaller room so another class of 16 could have our old room. This
 161: new room is an awkward shape - some students cannot see the board at
 162: all unless they stand up and take about five steps. Ridiculous. Some
 163: of the 'old' students commented that the room was very small and I

164: agreed. Should I have? I said I would say something about it but also
 165: *hinted that students' complaints received a quicker response than*
 166: *teachers'.* 'Yes, I know' replied the student 'because we pay money'. I
 167: nodded in tacit agreement. I know management would scream if they
 168: heard this. He went and complained at breaktime and so did I. I know
 169: whose complaint will be followed up first, I have been in this
 170: situation so many times - a room which is too small, unsuitable,
 171: noisy, badly located (once in a class of kids with bars on the windows
 172: on the second floor with no fire escape!) that I feel fed up. Do I
 173: shut up and accept the unacceptable or encourage them to complain -
 174: especially when they are paying a lot of money. Oddly enough, students
 175: are very aware of all those things once they have been at the school
 176: for a while. I also found I also found out that one of my new students
 177: will be starting FCE examinations in less than two months' time - he
 178: is very early Pre-intermediate and my comments at last meeting about
 179: stricter entry testing requirements for Cambridge have gone unheeded.
 180: I pity the poor FCE teacher who will have to mould a Pre-Int student in
 181: Upper Int material. I wonder why the school doesn't take more care
 182: about things like this - exam results would be better, students more
 183: satisfied and teachers would have an easier task. The whole problem of
 184: entry testing, levels, exam candidates, comes up time and time again.
 185: But if he has the money and wants to do a more expensive exam class -
 186: let him.
 187:
 188: 8/1, written 13/1
 189: I have waited a while to write this down because I was so fed
 190: up/disgusted with what happened at the meeting.
 191:
 192: Staff meeting at which new programs were discussed - there was lots of
 193: subtle criticism which was basically ignored - it would still be
 194: introduced.
 195:
 196: I again brought up the problem of long versus short-term students and
 197: their conflicting goals which created a great deal of dissatisfaction.
 198: Director replied that that was 'the nature of the beast' and that was
 199: the teacher's challenge - to balance and manage this, implying that
 200: good teachers could and did, bad ones couldn't and didn't. I felt,
 201: once again, that teachers' comments, constructive criticism was being
 202: ignored. Wanted to scream.
 203:
 204: Discussion of the program and debate about a textbook driven versus a
 205: generic syllabus caused the Director to make remarks about dependence
 206: on the books (teachers not students) people becoming lazy, I felt this
 207: was insulting to all in the room. Never could students be at fault,
 208: lazy, incapable bad language learners, lacking in motivation,
 209: everything came back to the teacher - ignores basic findings in L2
 210: research regarding factors determining success in language learning.
 211: This meeting was, for me, a culmination of problems which have been
 212: building up for a long time. I feel that I am in a constant state of
 213: crisis and am undecided about attending the next meeting because
 214:
 215: 1) teachers' views are ignored or used against them.
 216: 2) the people in charge don't know what they are doing - re.
 217: Methodology, language learning.
 218: 3) classes are getting bigger, rooms smaller and I can't do my job

219: properly
 220: 4) inexperienced teachers are conducting placement tests.
 221: 5) there is no 'management by consensus', only by tyrannical rule.
 222: 6) teachers are expected to do more and more without an increase in
 223: pay or thanks.
 224:
 225: It goes on and on.
 226:
 227: On this same day, I taught a 'study skills' course which wasn't that
 228: at all, the cause is a PET exam practice book and I feel a sham
 229: standing there pretending to teach them stuff that wasn't general
 230: English. It was too easy and dreadfully boring, when I told the Head
 231: Teacher this - she could do much because that was the least
 232: troublesome of the courses. I find it problematic because I know these
 233: options are being offered so that the school can be seen to be
 234: offering a diversified product . The problem is less the problem
 235: itself but knowing that offering criticisms or suggestions for change
 236: won't be well received and that I have to think carefully before doing
 237: this in front of management? Will I be re-employed, regarded as a
 238: troublemaker? Will the person I talk to understand what it is I'm
 239: talking about? I doubt it - the week has been filled with constant
 240: sources of tension and stress. Tomorrow - new students and a third
 241: room change an trying to help these s's assimilate in the middle of a
 242: course when I feel they're just being added to classes to reach the
 243: school max of 16. The only way I can deal with numbers like this is to
 244: go on automatic pilot and do fairly mundane stuff - I think the
 245: students are quite happy with this but I feel frustrated when I know
 246: I/they could achieve more in a class of 8. This has happened at every
 247: school I've worked at.
 248:
 249: 14/1, written 16/1
 250:
 251: A student was unhappy because she felt that by doing skills work in
 252: afternoon lessons we weren't 'studying English' which is grammar and
 253: writing. I had a long discussion with her trying to explain the usual
 254: things. 'I paid a lot of money and some people are here just for
 255: holidays and fun. What she wanted was hard work, not fun and games. I
 256: left work feeling stressed and tired that this as a problem which
 257: could never be solved in General English. Differing expectations,
 258: conflicting goals, nationality, age, motivation, the image the school
 259: gives, what actually happens and what a student expects are all
 260: pulling at each other*. In the middle is the teacher. I nearly decided
 261: to leave the industry that afternoon. I know that it was impossible to
 262: keep all me students happy , teach them in a way I felt was worthwhile
 263: and that they were also satisfied with. I am always aware of the fact
 264: that students must be kept happy or they'll complain (I alerted the
 265: Head Teacher who talked to the student, who is content for the
 266: moment). I feel that I have to be all things to all people, a
 267: magician. That afternoon I wondered what course of action I should
 268: take and how I should teach - was I a good/bad teacher, what stance
 269: should I take. How should I be?
 270:
 271: I couldn't come up with a solution. So I give them what they want -
 272: fairly regimented structure-based lessons and skills work, lots of gap
 273: fills and grammar topped up with speaking etc activities. It's not

274: exactly trying to innovate as teaching 15 students (8 nationalities in
 275: a room that is too small!!) is enough. I felt that what I was doing
 276: was almost untenable and if I really did what I believed in ie
 277: followed my principles - I'd leave the GE classroom forever which
 278: I'll probably do. PS this seems to be the theme of the moment in our
 279: staffroom. Teacher X was told by students in a Study Skills class that
 280: they wanted to do Study Skills so they could practise speaking ,
 281: another did it for more grammar - so what is Study Skills anyway?
 282: Teacher Y - had in the same session one student leave because she
 283: didn't want to do so much grammar and wanted speaking, another said
 284: she wanted to transfer down to do more grammar, another wants to learn
 285: Business English skills , another 'I'm just a kid - I love games'.
 286:
 287: All this seems to lead to but one conclusion - the GE teacher needs to
 288: have multiple personalities, to successfully cope with what I see as
 289: an increasingly impossible situation.
 290:
 291: This is probably the single most important recurrent critical incident
 292: that I have reported so far. Directors/owners will often reply by
 293: suggesting that the teachers' skill/mastery is in their ability to
 294: achieve this impossible balance. At the end of the day the teacher
 295: aims for something which makes as many students as possible feel that
 296: they are learning, not that their teacher is teaching them without
 297: students having to put in any real effort.
 298:
 299: 17/1, written 19/1
 300:
 301: My difficult student situation was sorted out - everything was OK
 302: because it wasn't my lessons that was a problem. The Head Teacher
 303: actually said 'She was very happy with you ... you are a very good
 304: teacher... but we knew you were a very good teacher anyway! Nobody at
 305: this school has ever observed or seen me teach - students thought I
 306: was good so I must be. Student is unhappy with other teacher Z so she
 307: must be bad. Students judgements about quality of teaching seem to be
 308: holier than thou. I was amazed that students degree of satisfaction
 309: with the product was confused with/equated with actual quality*. This
 310: leads to an endless cycle of s/he's a good teacher s/he's a bad
 311: teacher - a game which I'm expected to play. Being good/bad seems
 312: critical in determining students satisfaction and is also the reason
 313: given for ultimate success or failure.
 314:
 315: 28/2 and 1/3
 316: General: Problems/disagreements/arguments/negotiation with students
 317: about going up and sometimes down.
 318: The idea that after so many weeks a student will have magically
 319: changed from eg an Upp-Int student into an advanced one. Schools often
 320: structure their courses so that students go up through the system
 321: without achieving real proficiency in all/major skills at the various
 322: levels - students wanting to go up because they've done all the
 323: grammar in the book have/have 'done' the book before or want to leave
 324: with 'Advanced' on their certificates. This week a student who had
 325: been in Upp-Int for 4 weeks informed me of his plan. 1 month's holiday
 326: - on his return he would spend a month in Pre-Advanced and a month in
 327: Advanced. He looked puzzled when I explained that this was not
 328: necessarily automatic, it depended on the level of English and his

329: teachers' recommendations. He won't buy a good learners dictionary,
 330: has bought a coursebook to share with his flatmate and asks me 'Could
 331: your tell me all the rules for 'of' in English?! - The system and
 332: students perception of it annoys the hell out of me. Is it only me who
 333: as language learning as the goal. The students who're most insistent
 334: about going up who spend all their time with other students , hardly
 335: open a paper and demand I tell them everything.
 336: 'I paid a lot of money' - is something students from E. Europe have
 337: said to me lately - one in reply to me asking her to get a late note,
 338: the other when I explained that I couldn't answer his (complicated and
 339: obscure) Q's while we were in the middle of an activity. Another said
 340: 'I prefer it when you tell me, when I asked him to look up a word in
 341: the dictionary for a change! Students seem to feel that all this money
 342: entitles them to make all sorts of exacting and ridiculous demands on
 343: their teacher , that I am responsible for their program and that they
 344: are there to be spoon-fed. Few students in GE show genuine motivation
 345: or display study skills/learning strategies. Most are in holiday mode
 346: and I wonder why they bother at all.
 347:
 348: 26/3 , written 1/3
 349: ANOTHER HORRIBLE STAFF MEETING
 350: I went to this one because the DOS was giving a workshop on Classroom
 351: Management. Instead the Head Teacher lectured us about do's and
 352: don't's for 1 hour 20 mins - with 10 minutes left over for discussion
 353: of problem students etc.
 354: We were told not to sympathise with students who complain about large
 355: classes and small rooms etc etc. Most staff suggestions were met with
 356: such a poor response that most of us felt quite brow-beaten by the
 357: end.
 358:
 359: It wasn't leaning, rather lecturing on school policy and rules.
 360:
 361: There is a particular problem with the Head Teacher - she discusses
 362: private matters very loudly in the staffroom (ie student/teacher
 363: problems, teachers looking for jobs, what happened in the interviews
 364: and why she will/won't employ them. She mimics other teachers and
 365: compares herself to the former DOS - 'He used to arrive at 8.20 and
 366: leave at 4 on the dot - but sometimes you just have to stay when
 367: there's a lot of work etc etc' - in front of everybody!! She shouted
 368: at me this week for 'abandoning ' my class. She is the source of a lot
 369: of stress and distress, many teachers are looking for other jobs. This
 370: person is out of her depth, is unqualified and naïve. It devalues what
 371: we do and there is a lack of professional leadership.
 372:
 373: Some results - some students have been grossly misplaced, relatively
 374: inexperienced teachers teach high level classes, there is a very high
 375: turnover, new teachers feel unsupported and when they ask the Head
 376: Teacher for help she gives them songs and games.
 377:
 378: Conclusion
 379:
 380: It may seem like I have a long litany of complaints and I guess I do.
 381:
 382: The problems are worst at this particular school because of a number
 383: of recent changes. Better, more pleasant colleges however, can't

384: escape from some of the endemic problems.
385:
386: Ultimately I feel that I want/need to leave the industry altogether -
387: it has grown too fast. Well-qualified, professional teachers teaching
388: GE have an almost impossible task - differing student expectations and
389: study objectives conflict with what the college wants to give them
390: (which isn't itself always clear - all of these then collide with what
391: teachers want to do in the classroom and their version of the best way
392: to go about it. Students want to leave feeling they have made huge
393: progress in their English and that it is the teachers' responsibility
394: to fulfil this aim, the college and management want students to leave
395: as a satisfied client who will spread the good word and encourage them
396: to attend the school so that the Marketing Manager doesn't have to go
397: on so many o.s. trips to create new markets. Teachers want to do a lot
398: of different things - the main one is to feel they are doing
399: something rewarding and fulfilling - I don't.
400:
401:

3.5 D5

1: 24th July

2: This is my second month with this group (following on from Elem 1). I
3: was away for the first week of the course and, upon my return, I have
4: found the problems encountered last month have only compounded this
5: month.

6:

7: The main difficulty, which I find compromising my professionalism, is
8: the huge disparity between the students' levels in this group. In my
9: experience teaching TESOL, this problem is so recurrent that I feel
10: that every month it crops up again. It is a constant threat to one's
11: professionalism and it makes tremendous demands on the teacher in
12: terms of preparation time.

13:

14: For example, last month we enrolled a Swiss German student who was a
15: true beginner rather than an Elementary student. He was without the
16: basic knowledge - of numbers, days of the week, written or spoken
17: English of any kind - that the other students possessed. Fortunately,
18: he was confident and tried to get whatever she could out of the
19: lesson, so, the school did not make any special provisions for him.

20:

21: This month there are 3 such students that have been thrown into Elem 2
22: and a handful of other weaker new students. They should be doing
23: Elementary 1, but the school obviously wants to save money and has
24: jammed them into a class of 15. I spoke to the director about this
25: problem, and he said that we might be able to create 2 next week when
26: some new students arrive.

27:

28: In the meantime, I have to spend twice as long preparing lessons in
29: other to meet the needs of 2 distinct groups being taught at the same
30: time. On top of this, I have been asked to resume an area of
31: responsibility after school hours for which all of my hours have been
32: withdrawn, since the school has shrunk along with teaching staff.
33: Initially I refused to take on this extra responsibility, but have
34: resumed reluctantly in order to preserve the services the school
35: promises students in the brochure. It is not 4:45 as I sit here
36: recording my day. Not only am I tired, but I have a strep A infection
37: from a tropical ulcer and I really should have gone home at 3:30, my
38: contracted hours and rested up!

39:

40: 25th July

41: This morning I fortunately checked on the study centre (language lab)
42: before taking my class in. It had never been left unlocked, and 10 of
43: the tapes for recording had been removed to some unspecified
44: destination. Once again, I was lucky to find a box of blank tapes to
45: use (missing tapes has been an ongoing problem). When the students
46: went into the lab, some of the machines were playing up (as usual). 2
47: were completely out of order. (These have been out of commission for a
48: few months). One was squeaking incessantly and couldn't be placated
49: despite ingenious manipulations. Another didn't record properly. Yet
50: another did not record at all.

51:

52: Nevertheless, I need to count myself as fortunate once again, because
53: students were absent today, so we had just enough machines to go

54: around! I find it a pity, though, that my capability to provide
55: elementary students with the pronunciation practice they need is
56: constantly compromised by deteriorating equipment which isn't
57: consistently serviced.
58:
59: 31st July
60: Today we got another new student - which pushes our class size over
61: the max. limit of 15. Once again, I was grateful that someone was
62: absent, because the students have been complaining that the class is
63: too crowded.
64:
65: Tomorrow I'll need to do a jigsaw listening instead of the language
66: lab, because we simply won't fit with the broken down machines.
67:
68: At least the director has recognised the ramification of not having
69: opened on Elementary class three weeks ago. He has promised to try to
70: open one on Monday, since we have yet more new students enrolling in
71: the middle of the course.
72:
73: Last week we allowed the stronger students to move up to LINT. This
74: helped the level split a bit, but one still exists - in content as
75: much as level, since new students have been introduced into the group
76: more than once a week. This regrouping and introducing and rearranging
77: is extremely disruptive and occurs frequently at the college. It
78: becomes hard to do revision, to build on what we've learned or to give
79: tests. As a teacher, the lack of consistency in my class members
80: constantly compromises my professionalism.
81:
82: August 1
83:
84: Another student asked to be moved up to a 'higher level' today, as he
85: had perceived that the class was composed of both E1 and E2. I
86: informed him that the school was considering dividing the group into 2
87: classes on Tuesday. As a result, I won't be able to plan for next week
88: once again, and will have to come in on my day off to do so next week.
89:
90: I just received a call from the director. The school has decided to
91: definitely not open an Elementary I class. Instead some of the
92: stronger elementary students will be artificially moved up. This
93: includes a 6 month booking - a student should really move up
94: sequentially through the levels to attain the fluency he lacks.
95:
96: The repercussions of this decision are greater than it appears. In
97: order to move up, my students, students in higher levels will also be
98: artificially forced up - a very disastrous effect.
99:
100: 6th August
101: Today one of the students that was forced up to LINT came to me. He
102: said the class was too difficult for him and that he wouldn't be able
103: to take the class test on Friday. I agreed with him and gave him the
104: revision test that the elementary class would be doing, so he could do
105: that one instead if he wanted to.
106:
107: Also, with my elementary class, I decided that it wouldn't be fair to
108: give them the test officially, since they've arrived at various stages

109: of the course - the most recent only yesterday! Instead, they started
 110: the test this afternoon and will finish it over 2 nights as homework.
 111: Hopefully, this will create less anxiety for those who don't know some
 112: of the material.
 113:
 114: As for next week, it looks as if the school is going to concede on the
 115: level split for elementary. Hopefully, the weaker students will go
 116: back to the beginning of the syllabus/book, and the stronger ones will
 117: go on to the more challenging material. Unfortunately, my work week
 118: has been cut down to 2 days - a common occurrence this time of year,
 119: even when you've worked for a company for 5 years - so I won't be here
 120: to speak on behalf of students. At least my teaching partner will be
 121: able to speak up for them. However, neither one of us are sure what
 122: level we will be given. The school often prefers, I suppose out of
 123: convenience, to randomly assign teachers to levels and change them
 124: almost every course. This usually destroys the little consistency the
 125: students can get from the fact that their teacher knows their needs,
 126: strengths and weaknesses and can fend for them as best as s/he can in
 127: the midst of a myriad of chaotic forces! If a teacher really wants to
 128: stay with a level, s/he usually has to be very persistent in
 129: requesting this.
 130:
 131: August 8th
 132: We got to read the results of the evaluation today. Several students
 133: complained that the class size was too big and the room too narrow. A
 134: few mentioned that the study centre was not adequate, and many
 135: complained that the computer lab did not meet their needs.
 136:
 137: The computer lab is definitely an ongoing saga and not one I've
 138: mentioned before as I've not had the pleasure of personally
 139: supervising it. However, since many of my students brought it up on
 140: the evaluation forms, it does colour their opinion of the
 141: 'professionalism' of my college and bears mentioning.
 142:
 143: Last year my school opened a new building, right on (Z) - and since
 144: the day it was opened, it has largely been a marble monument for
 145: overseas agents, politicians ready to sing the school's praises, and
 146: any other agents willing to assist the school in publicity or
 147: marketing. From the teachers' perspective, there have been many
 148: pitfalls despite the flashy veneer both for themselves and their
 149: students. Although the front rooms overlook the gorgeous blue ocean
 150: horizon, they are not very conducive to teaching and learning.
 151:
 152: Today at the staff meeting, teachers complained of having to wear
 153: 'sunnies' in order to bear the glare of the late-rising winter sun.
 154: They revealed that students have been complaining that the back of
 155: their necks have been getting burnt as they turn from the reflected
 156: glare. Everyone insisted that we write these complaints into the
 157: minutes of the meeting, as their numerous requests to management over
 158: the past years for vertical blinds have gone ignored. OHP's, needless
 159: to say, have become a useless tool, even though many new ones were
 160: purchased for the new building.
 161:
 162: Anyway, back to my original point - the computer lab, which happens to
 163: literally be the 'crowning glory' of the new building. The shook

164: invested a huge amount in 12 IBM computers and installed them in the
165: lavish penthouse, once again with sweeping views perfect for the most
166: enviable brochure.

167:

168: However, after the initial investment, attempts to actually manage
169: this new resource started to fall apart. An ex-teacher knowledgeable
170: regarding computerese was hired to organise the equipment and give
171: teachers a few blitz 'how-to-do-it' sessions. There were only 2 or 3
172: of the latter, and these were largely confusing due to our large
173: numbers and lack of prior computer training on the job. It has always
174: surprised me how the school can expect lesson materials to be desk-top
175: publishing standard and yet not be willing to assist teachers with
176: adequate training (to remedy this defect personally, I'm now taking a
177: course at (P) at my own expense - at least I'll be able to get a tax
178: deduction from it).

179:

180: The ex-teacher managing the computer lab soon had a major
181: disagreements with the management. Consequently, he left after only a
182: few weeks of part time work before the computers were all properly
183: linked to the printers and all the initial kinks had been worked out.

184:

185: The school then made an agreement with (B), that they would use our
186: facilities to give computer courses to our students and teachers. (B)
187: subsequently can in and undid the organisation of the hired
188: ex-teacher. They installed their own software on the machine and
189: linked them to the server, This system made access to the computer
190: even more difficult requiring every student in the school to be issued
191: with 2 access cards. What's more, is (B) pulled out too (when they
192: didn't get the enrolments expected and left us with complications.

193:

194: The upshot is that teaches have been unable to print directly off the
195: computers for months. Many have stopped taking tie classes there as
196: they would have to individually save each students' work onto a disc
197: and transfer it one computer to print final copies of work. With all
198: the other stresses of individual students and the frequent problems
199: with the printer it all becomes too stressful.

200:

201: Therefore this potentially tremendous resources is only left to be
202: used by students 1 hour a week in computer lab or after school. Most
203: of the new students that have trickled in during the course have not
204: been issued access codes, as the teacher who has inherited supervision
205: is on holiday. They then naturally came to me and their other teachers
206: to express their resentment at being locked out of the computers. I,
207: for one, being in the old building, had no idea that the main teacher
208: looking after the computers was away, so I told them to go and see
209: him. No wonder the poor students have expressed their frustration with
210: the computer lab on the evaluation forms.

211:

212: August 15

213: I have been moved off the problematic elementary level, bust as I
214: previously predicted, the lack of concern for originally placed
215: students at the correct level has negatively affected the dynamics of
216: the higher ones. This could plainly be seen by the poor performance of
217: the students show have been artificially and prematurely forced up to
218: the LINY 3 class due to lack of room in the lower levels. As we

219: teachers persistently informed the directors and management about our
 220: ability to cater for the level mix in a maximally, or should I say
 221: 'oversized, elementary class. Nevertheless, they refused to open an
 222: Elementary 1 class due to cost saving measures.
 223:
 224: In any case, returning to my original point of the consequences of
 225: this choice. This past week, I inherited the LINT 3 class, and the
 226: student who had been at the school the longest., was in many ways the
 227: weakest. She refused to speak and wanted me to feed her words on a
 228: silver spoon, which she then ineptly reiterated. This particular
 229: student was one who had clamoured to be move up, even though I
 230: counselled her and advised her against it because of her lack of
 231: fluency, inaccuracy, pron difficulties, etc.
 232:
 233: Nevertheless, when the school itself decided to do a reshuffle, we
 234: chose this student go up. The philosophy was one I've seen repeatedly
 235: arise, that is 'give the customer what s/he wants, regardless of
 236: educational objectives.
 237:
 238: The result of following such a philosophy was the same on this
 239: occasion as always. A student left up without truly improving her
 240: fluency, perhaps the one area where we can sometimes make a
 241: significance difference.
 242:
 243: August 22nd (Fri)
 244: The winter season saga of students constantly coming and going reached
 245: the heights of absurdity today. As we were taking the compulsory class
 246: photos for the four students leaving at the end of week 2, a girl I
 247: had never seen before was not only hovering around us smiling at me,
 248: but she was attempting to wedge her way into the photos. Not wanting
 249: to exclude any (college) students or hurt anyone's feelings I didn't
 250: question her However, after the proceedings, she approached me,
 251: wanting to know where her certificate was. I naturally felt awkward
 252: about not having one prepared, but at the same time felt somewhat
 253: justified. After all, this girl had simply been dumped in our level
 254: after a month at the school. She couldn't have enjoyed the change very
 255: much, because she hardly attended. Even the last day she had skipped
 256: class entirely and had simply make an appearance at the end to get the
 257: certificate.
 258:
 259: Perhaps one could pin the problem on the slack student, but I feel the
 260: school should have pointed out that she was leaving the very next week
 261: they shifted her to our class! The lack of a reliable system to track
 262: the movement of students and pass on the necessary information about
 263: them has long been a problem. It is left to the teacher to check a
 264: lengthy leavers list at the end of each week, in alphabetical rather
 265: than class order. There is another list issued week 1 with the leaving
 266: dates, but if students enter the class at anytime after this point,
 267: these dates aren't listed. Teachers then have to make enquiries, search
 268: for Day 1 sheet if they're available, or access the (S) computer
 269: system. As far as the latter option goes, most teachers aren't trained
 270: to enter the database, nor does the need of passwords encourage them
 271: to try.
 272:
 273: At the staff meeting today, a few promises were made relating to

274: problems I've mentioned in this journal. The school has agreed to put
275: up some blinds at the (college) to shade the students from the glaring
276: sun. However, they have decided only to put a tinted shade on either
277: side of the sliding glass door. I sincerely doubt this is going to
278: protect the students from sunburn, and it certainly is not going to
279: darken the room enough to use the OHP.
280:
281: The directors also said that the repairman would be coming to the
282: study centre. despite this gesture in the right direction, though, the
283: teachers have their doubts that this will solve the undependability
284: problems of this resource. After all, the repairman has come in
285: several times before, and the equipment always seems to break down
286: soon after. Perhaps a new language lab is in order.
287:
288: Finally, we were also promised that the mess in the computer lab would
289: be straightened out. The network that (B) had installed will be
290: removed. I just hope that the new networking isn't worse. As well,
291: students who want to use e-mail will now have to pay an extra fee, and
292: they will be issued with a disc at the beginning of their course.
293: Perhaps the changes in the computer lab are motivated more by the
294: promise of these profits than they are by a desire to have a
295: dependable resource for teachers and students. Whatever the underlying
296: cause, I suppose that we staff can only feel grateful if the
297: improvements actually materialise after these months of madness.
298:
299:
300:
301:

3.6 D6

1: 29th May 97

2: 3.50

3: While passing through the library a senior teacher entered with a
4: group of Japanese people in tow. I remember stopping and wondering
5: what my role in their passage should entail. Initially I was unsure
6: who they were - visitors , prospective students, enrolled students or
7: study tour participants or agents. When I decided they were new to 6
8: the next question was whether to assume a helpful smiling demeanour,
9: carry on with my business or wait for the teacher to introduce me. I
10: settled for a hesitant smile and excused myself. The senior teacher
11: gave little indication as to whether this was what was expected. This
12: is not the first time I've been undecided as to what role I should
13: adopt - teacher or customer service rep. Those present ten Japanese
14: students (?), senior teacher, relief librarian, students in library
15: and myself.

16:

17: 5.10

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

23:

24: 30th May

25: Teacher Development sessions of the most pleasant part of my week.

26: Today's "The Best laid plans.... lessons that come unstuck".

27:

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

37:

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

47:

48: A vocal group maintained that customer satisfaction was the most n.

49: b. factor to be kept in mind during the lesson. Keep em happy!

50:

51: 2/June/97

52: Conversation in Staff Room. Head T. put an overseas researcher in a

53: Pre Int class. The student subsequently proved to be an elementary

54: Student. Teacher was told to 'dumb down the class for the duration of
 55: her stay at 6. This struck me as a poor solution, but the constraints
 56: of the staff room gave me no permission to offer an opinion. It
 57: certainly didn't seem like a smart idea to say anything. The whole
 58: measure of each lesson was to be modified.
 59:
 60: 3/June/97
 61: HT asked me to fill in an early leavers form for a student who had
 62: already departed. This form rates S, the 4 macro skills (ASLPR) and
 63: their performance in class. After due consideration, I gave her the
 64: form. She was a little disappointed in my ratings. She asked me to
 65: reconsider. I replied that I had thought it through carefully, yet she
 66: indicated that it was too low. I resented amending it and she asked me
 67: to erase my results and mark it for her attention. Presumably she
 68: intended to reflect a more glowing performance that I thought
 69: appropriate. She explained this by saying that he was a special case
 70: and that she would take care of it. The implication was that my
 71: professional opinion didn't sync with another issue that I should have
 72: been aware of. I can only guess that there was a sales
 73: issue to consider. This type of thing is not atypical, T's usually
 74: intuit the situation better than I did.
 75:
 76: 5 June 4.50pm
 77: Lesson prep interrupted DOS asks for help with some photocopying. Job
 78: Desc?
 79:
 80: 6/June/97
 81: Professional Development Session today threw up similar feeling to
 82: previous one. This dealt with a workshop that sought to provide
 83: metaphors for individual teaching style. Once again several assistant
 84: head teachers were present and I couldn't help thinking that it was
 85: unwise to be completely open about personal teaching philosophy.
 86:
 87: When paired with a teacher who I trusted and who had always taught at
 88: 6 for an extended period. I remarked that it felt uncool to talk about
 89: or challenge some ideals. She told me that it best to be extremely
 90: careful about what I said in the earshot of some teacher (senior
 91: teachers!) as they would make judgments about personnel based on these
 92: comments.
 93:
 94: She seemed particularly tuned in to the institutional culture and it
 95: was reassuring to hear her voice some of the reservations I had been
 96: personally entertaining about there matters. She stressed that saying
 97: the right things and being seen to fit into the school and its
 98: implicit assumptions about teaching was more important than what went
 99: on in the classroom.
 100:
 101: Writing this journal has become somewhat of a covert (outlaw?)
 102: activity and I think I'll keep it locked in my briefcase from now on.
 103:
 104: Today's observations continue to be a worry in the light of ongoing
 105: insecurity of tenure/job security.
 106:
 107: PS
 108: My metaphor (assigned by my partner) was 'Buddy'. My position on

109: testing , roll taking made up a profile of a teacher of less value
 110: than 'cartographer' 'Mad Professor' etc etc.
 111:
 112: 12 June
 113: 1. A program manager recounted an incident between himself and DOS. He
 114: had been asked to cut his hair. Apparently it didn't reflect the image
 115: appropriate for the corporate culture. This teacher's hair was neat
 116: but long enough for a pony tail. It seems his presentation was more
 117: important than his teaching ability. As a dip qualified he was most
 118: confused.
 119:
 120: 2. A lesson I had collaborated on with another teacher focussing on
 121: Pauline Hanson was vetoed by the Head Teacher. Reasoning was that if
 122: was too sensitive from a marketing perspective. The topic was in
 123: response to a student request. The tension between pedagogy and
 124: company demands was particularly obvious here. The other teacher was a
 125: bit surprised by all this and was under the impression that student
 126: generated subject matter was OK to use regardless of topic. I am no
 127: longer so sure about this. All the crap about needs analysis, social
 128: utility and authentic materials contents all seems like rhetoric these
 129: days.
 130:
 131: 13 June
 132: Once again ASLPR rating time and customer expectations etc play as big
 133: a role as competency or preparedness for a jump up to the next class.
 134:
 135: There seems to be a number of coded phrases that mean 'Put this person
 136: up to keep them happy' or 'it's necessary to achieve a balance in
 137: class numbers for this person to be promoted'.
 138: Typical eggs are - 'She always does her homework'
 139: What dya reckon?
 140: - 'His attendance is good, what do you
 141: think?'
 142:
 143: Of course only the senior teacher can say these things. It's a very
 144: confusing process. It would be a whole lot easier if it was a little
 145: bit more up front.
 146: Japanese schools are much more up front with this type of thing.
 147:
 148: 16 June
 149: H teacher asked me to brief a new teacher who is coming in to teach a
 150: demonstration lesson in my class. I wonder if being asked to pass on
 151: the cultural agreements we all tacitly make with the company is part
 152: of this. Am I supposed to say 'that which a Head Teacher doesn't dare
 153: say/' Should I? Perhaps it's an acknowledgment from the school that I
 154: can be trusted to keep silent.
 155:
 156: I'm becoming more comfortable with the undercurrent here now that I've
 157: had a chance to think about it more carefully. However, I can't help
 158: thinking it would be much better all round if management and their
 159: representatives could be a bit more explicit about their aims and
 160: expectations. It would go a long way towards cutting back the
 161: hypocrisy that this is an educational institution. It's much closer to
 162: a business that deals in education.
 163:

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

219:
 220: She was given a not that included the following: 'No matter what your
 221: missionary aims are....."
 222:
 223: The fact that she was sent the message rather than being invited to
 224: discuss it seems to be a feature of an organisation or a body
 225: corporate rather than a school.
 226:
 227: More and more I am becoming acutely aware that this is a company
 228: selling education rather than a school that is organised like a
 229: company. When I first arrived here I thought it was the former but
 230: since writing this diary and thinking about it I've changed my mind.
 231: It is much more like the big 'Schools' (language services) companies
 232: that dominate the market in Japan. Not as efficient though.
 233:
 234: 23 June
 235: Testing today.
 236: It was brought to my attention that in testing recently (controlled
 237: listening, reading and writing) a teacher was reprimanded for sending
 238: two students out for cheating.
 239:
 240: I found several cheating in my class and felt unable to do much more
 241: than raise an eyebrow.
 242:
 243: The loss of face clients experience is apparently bad for business.
 244:
 245: Once again the integrity of the education compromised by business
 246: concerns - typical.
 247:
 248: 24th June
 249:
 250: Head Teacher overheard bowing to student complaints about levels
 251: resulting from oral and written tests. Several changes as a result. It
 252: seems the customer is always right. I suppose the last few days have
 253: highlighted just how arbitrary placement really is. I've always had
 254: doubts about the precision of the testing instruments but I'm even
 255: more cynical about the process.
 256:
 257: Providing edu-tainment tailored and sanitised for changing groups is
 258: probably the best job description for the kind of work I'm
 259: undertaking these days. I guess I really don't mind but the fiction of
 260: the inservice sessions meeting teacher practice is sometimes a little
 261: hard to swallow.
 262:
 263: 26/June
 264: After Tuesday's reflection on self identity today I approached my work
 265: from the position of a service provider rather than a teacher per se.
 266:
 267: It actually went quite smoothly and after one little customer service
 268: (we try harder) event a Pre-Int student trotted out her first tag
 269: question. 'You're a good teacher aren't you?' I was a little taken
 270: aback by this. Initially but going the extra mile from a service
 271: perspective seems to be read as good teaching. Bloody revelation. I
 272: wonder if it wouldn't be something to include in teacher training
 273: courses. Not only is it read as good practice by S's, Management also

274: interpret it as quality education. I would still disagree with any
 275: argument that failed to contrast the two though.
 276:
 277: 27 June
 278: Professional Development Session today focussed on cross cultural
 279: difference and awareness raising (or something like that). It was held
 280: hot on the heels of attached memo.
 281:
 282: The presenter went to great length to disassociate herself it from the
 283: memo however HT used the opportunity to point out the importance and
 284: relationship of both classroom management and materials content to
 285: future student numbers. I guess this was their idea (or hers) of issue
 286: management.
 287:
 288: 30th June
 289: Asst Hd Teachers approaches a teacher about a student who is leaving.
 290: 'Does x deserve our highest marks? What do you think?' there seemed
 291: little doubt what sort of answer this type of question was supposed to
 292: elicit. Of course the teacher supplied the answer that was required
 293: and the student received the highest marks. This has happened quite a
 294: few times over the last month and its usually because the student in
 295: question (or their agent) is able to influence repeat or further
 296: business for the company. I don't know if it's talked about explicitly
 297: in some instances but it always seems to be just under the surface.
 298:
 299: 17th July
 300: Since writing this diary the climate at 6 has changed significantly.
 301: Industrial action has created a tension that has severely eroded my
 302: self image as a 'service provider'. It seems that it is all one way.
 303: Management has not been able to extend itself in negotiations with
 304: teachers even though teachers have been bending over backwards (at
 305: least I have) to adopt a new corporate attitude. It's all rather sad.
 306: I feel that the climate at the moment has made it impossible to
 307: persist with 'teacher as corporate creature'. Teaching staff are
 308: nervous about job security and morale is low. Us and Them is the new
 309: catch phrase. Efficiency and Professionalism feel like early
 310: casualties. (see memos from management). The memos seem patronising
 311: and frame any dissension as deviant and unsociable. By definition
 312: deviants can't represent the company. It follows teachers are no
 313: longer company reps.
 314:

3.7 D7

1: 14-Jul-97 05:24:19 PM

2:

3: Must comment on something that just gave me the shits the other day;

4: on the 11th to be exact. The usual end of module meeting was called

5: for all to attend, so at 2.30 most teachers assembled around the usual

6: tables. I sometimes wonder whether the others come to these

7: 'get-togethers' with the same expectations that I have; that is, that

8: I always 'expect' the ubiquitous rap-over- the-knuckles for some

9: obscure form that none of us have filled out, or for some other inane

10: reason. I find it so difficult to remember all those bloody

11: bureaucratic documents that so often have to be filed, or photocopied

12: and handed in to such-and-such. Comes with the territory I suppose.

13: Anyway, back to my original gripe!

14:

15: It has been, at least up until now, a policy of the school that all

16: excursions outside the school be organized around and relevant to the

17: topic of study for any one class, within any one module[4 weeks].It

18: goes without saying that an excursion to the zoo, however enjoyable

19: for a great deal of students, would not be recommended if your topic

20: for the month/week was Health and Lifestyle. Even though this policy

21: caused some frustration amongst some of the more 'hedonistic'

22: students, and not a little consternation amongst some members of

23: staff, it was generally considered fair and therefore, adhered to. In

24: effect, it was a reasonable policy and at the very least it gave

25: students a sense of structure and purpose, which many of them lament is

26: often missing from course outlines. For me personally, it offered a

27: way out. I'm sure I'm not the only teacher who doesn't particularly

28: savour those sticky moments on the 'populist' excursion routes when

29: you're stuck for conversation with a low -Elementary class. At the end

30: of the day, this more structured approach to excursion outings helped

31: me in my planning of activities for the entire module, and the

32: personally gruelling excursion that was to come.

33:

34: Then came the dreaded news at the Friday arvo meeting, that we are now

35: officially untethered to the policy regarding excursions; that future

36: excursions are to be FUN. I've just spent 3 odd months telling my EAP

37: students that we can't go to the Aquarium, the Zoo or the cinemas in

38: George St, because they are not relevant to our topic. I'm sure when I

39: tell them this module, that we can go anywhere they like, they'll be

40: wondering about the relevance that I so forcefully administered to

41: various disappointed classes.

42:

43: The most frustrating thing is that I feel as though my authority has

44: been stripped away to some degree. Even if I wanted to continue with

45: excursions that dealt particularly with the topic at hand, my students

46: would protest that the other classes were doing FUN things and that

47: they weren't. Let's hope that the new policy remains so that the

48: students don't think we're taciturn . Over and out!

49:

50: 15 July, 1997

51: Well, it's the beginning of the new module today. Last Friday I told a

52: student, a Japanese woman, that her English wasn't yet good enough for

53: her to be able to go to the next level. I was very aware that her good
 54: friend, also in my class, was going up a level and that there would be
 55: hell to pay. These students have been like bloody Siamese twins since
 56: day 1! And of course on Friday, when I finally came face to face with
 57: her, she was obviously very upset that she wasn't going up with her
 58: friend. I was diplomatic and sensitive to a tee, but nothing would
 59: console her and she broke down. This made me feel terrible, but I
 60: continued to try to explain the problems that she had with her
 61: language acquisition, and that if she had just another month in
 62: Pre-EAP, things might be better for her in the next module. Enter
 63: Monday morning, and there she is! Not in Pre-EAP as I'd suggested, but
 64: in EAPS, the intermediate level class I have this module ! Apparently
 65: Ross, the EAP Syllabus Director had spoken with her and suggested that
 66: she go up to EAPS and not EAPV [a level even higher in which her
 67: friend is now enrolled]. I did feel rather guilty about making her cry
 68: the other day, but now I was angry. Admittedly I had spoken with Ross
 69: about this student's negative response to my suggestion, [it was for
 70: her own good that she stayed in Pre EAP], but I never thought that
 71: Ross would over turn my decision. Effectively what he's done is under
 72: cut my professional opinion, and I've been left with the Big Bad Wolf
 73: syndrome. And the irony is.....today the same student didn't stop
 74: saying, "I don't understand". When do I put a student up or leave them
 75: where they are? Does it depend on theatrics, whether a student can
 76: convince a teacher to promote them?
 77:
 78: 17-Jul-97
 79: Today we took Industrial Action . We'd been talking with the
 80: Independent Education Union rep for a couple of weeks, trying to avoid
 81: going out, but considering the appalling offer that was made by our
 82: employer we really had no choice. You have to wonder though, if half
 83: an hour on strike will really make any type of difference at all ? I'm
 84: not the only one who went out exclusively for the purpose of
 85: supporting the more senior teachers; some of us I imagine must really
 86: be questioning the validity of the claim, and/or whether we should
 87: have accepted the 9% that was offered over three years.
 88:
 89: Another teacher, Constance, asked me today if I thought it was a
 90: good idea if we tried to get back the \$40 we'd spent on a school
 91: competition from the school's petty cash supply. I was dumb founded
 92: that she would even ask me!! She's one of those teachers who works so
 93: bloody hard, and is seen to be one of the beasts of burden around the
 94: place; a characteristic that certain other teachers and even the DOS
 95: heartily takes advantage of . If there's ever a new idea to experiment
 96: on, some professional development to be involved in or something to be
 97: created or organized, Constance is always around to be foisted into
 98: the lime-light by someone else. As relatively new teachers, we accept
 99: this as a form of 'initiation' which just may assist us in improving
 100: the longevity of our positions at UEC.
 101:
 102: Anyway, the "\$40" business came about from an art competition that
 103: sprang from a Project Work elective class that Constance and I were ,
 104: you guessed, 'elected' to take. Fair enough, I thought! My training
 105: was in visual arts anyhow, so it wasn't such a bad elective to pull.
 106: When exhibition time came around,[a suggestion from some members of
 107: senior staff], we came back with the idea that a prize should be

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

163: present perfect. P.S. - Constance and I left at 3.30 pm today. You
 164: could have cut the air with a knife. I don't think any of the others
 165: have ever seen us leave so early. And YES she was finally reimbursed
 166: that \$40! Tuesday,
 167:
 168: 22 July, 1997
 169: Another installment in the never ending story regarding prizes for
 170: students. You should have seen the prizes that were chosen to be
 171: awarded to students who contributed to the Trivia Competition!!!!
 172: Almost like a back hander when I saw those 'too expensive' T-shirts
 173: that we wanted to make use of, being suggested as a good idea by the
 174: DOS for her own little competition.[See diary reference 17 July]. In
 175: my opinion, I think some zealous members of staff must have been
 176: sufficiently enthused by our Art Competition, and decided to pull a
 177: stunt of their own. Not a bad idea, but when there are rules for some
 178: and rules for others, you begin to think that there's some sort of
 179: conspiracy going on. I can't help thinking that I, apart from the other
 180: more recent teachers who have come here, am being 'utilized' beyond
 181: what any reasonable job description would outline. I keep mentioning
 182: Constance and considering how good it would have been for her to be
 183: writing one of these diaries too. Both of us have really been working
 184: our arses off; to the point that the usually bubbly Constance has been
 185: looking more ragged, and yesterday actually threw a sickie. There is
 186: an ever present pressure being applied to us to perform with our
 187: particular classes. It started with the friggin Art Project class, and
 188: now it continues into the general running of our normal classes.
 189:
 190: The pressure being applied manifests itself in the following ways: A
 191: student may remark that I marked his/her attendance 'too harshly'; in
 192: other words I was being honest about a lack of punctuality, etc. Word
 193: gets back to the student's agent, who complains to a member of Admin.
 194: Senior teacher ,DOS or other approaches me demanding to see my class
 195: role. For the sake of keeping things peaceful, I'm asked to be
 196: 'lenient' with my marking. What the f--- does that mean? You were
 197: telling us, when we started here as new teachers, that the rolls were
 198: legal documents, and that it was very important that they were kept
 199: diligently!! What the hell do I do in a situation like this one?
 200:
 201: Tuesday, 29 July, 1997
 202: I'm totally in the dark regarding my extension studies class this
 203: module. There are some really hard bitten Slovaks amongst them, and of
 204: course a good share of the immovable Japanese who still refuse to
 205: speak. The other major problem is that the class ranges in ability
 206: from Intermediate to Advanced, so you can imagine the kind of
 207: problems I'm facing. Last week I obviously created a lesson that went
 208: well over the heads of most of the intermediate students, but even
 209: though it was difficult, there were times when students had time to
 210: speak freely [irrespective of the content of the lesson], and still
 211: missed the opportunity of using their speaking skills.
 212:
 213: In fact, during a class discussion last week while some of the more
 214: vocal Northern Europeans were 'having their fill', I couldn't help but
 215: notice that the Japanese students just completely shut up; I mean I'm
 216: well aware of the cultural differences when it comes to basic
 217: communication in the classroom; the way the more diffident,

218: self-conscious students tend to retreat when 'louder' ones are on
 219: their soap boxes, but one wonders sometimes if the silence is really a
 220: form of something else other than genuine lack of ability. It's my
 221: opinion that many students think that teachers are there in front of
 222: them for entertainment purposes; that if they sit there long enough
 223: and keep their mouths shut, that somehow the teacher will finally get
 224: frustrated enough, stop trying to make them speak, and 'show' them
 225: what they SHOULD be doing. I absolutely cringe at that moment when
 226: you've just asked a class a reasonably simple question, i.e.- as in a
 227: Monday morning warmer; Did you do anything different or more exciting
 228: on the weekend? And all you get is that horrific silent treatment!
 229: This is something that I particularly despise. Often I can spend a
 230: good half hour on the bus in the morning just wondering what the hell
 231: I'm going to use to warm up a class, when I can't even warm myself up
 232: for the battle of going into the room again, to start another week.
 233: Usually I get quite resentful of this realization. I'm rambling here I
 234: know, but this is the train of my thought most mornings on the bus:
 235: I've got to get them enthused. Even though I've spent most of my
 236: weekend indoors because of the rain, I now have to go into the room
 237: and initiate something. Yes, I know I'm the teacher, but just for once
 238: I'd love someone else to take the initiative. No, this doesn't mean
 239: that I'm forsaking my responsibility as instructor. I also have the
 240: right to have a shit day, or to have had a bad weekend. Isn't it
 241: possible that one of them couldn't just say, "o.k. Steven, sit down and
 242: just relax, we'll get on with a light discussion and you can come into
 243: the lesson at your own time.?" I'd give my right bloody arm! Realising
 244: that the aforementioned scenario is a dream, I get on with devising
 245: some quick-draw method of firing up the troops. But should this be a
 246: dream? Hey, aren't these people 'young adults'? Why can't they
 247: initiate something? Have we hand fed these students to the point that
 248: they can't even ask a simple, polite question, that isn't necessarily
 249: related to the prepositions we were doing? It really begs the
 250: question. There tends to be an unspoken acceptance of producing these
 251: clever warmers for ,let's face it, Adults, who probably consider them
 252: baby-ish, and possibly really don't give a stuff.
 253:
 254: Having gone over this a bit I tried something different. I entered the
 255: room yesterday, announced my abhorrence of Monday mornings, and sat
 256: behind a desk awaiting some action from the 12 odd faces I have to
 257: entertain everyday. Warmers only go so far; I'm convinced that if
 258: teachers made students aware of this anomaly in the first stages of
 259: any English lesson, then students wouldn't come into the room with the
 260: usual expectations of seeing another morning circus, and therefore
 261: forfeiting their contribution to initiating the beginning of the
 262: lesson. Perhaps they'd even learn a couple of polite Anglo-Saxon
 263: traditions, like starting a conversation about the weather! [Just a
 264: quick idea- perhaps I might try a Show and Tell segment next week.]
 265:
 266:
 267: Tuesday, August 05, 1997
 268: Jake, one of my Korean students, came to me on Friday in the
 269: classroom. He wanted to speak to me outside. I thought it was a little
 270: strange considering we were in the middle of the lesson, but he looked
 271: as if he had something on his mind. When I got outside the room with
 272: him, he bowed his head, and began weeping very softly. He asked me to

273: excuse his not being particularly interested in the lesson, as he had
 274: a personal problem with a friend. On enquiring about his dilemma, he
 275: predictably closed up, and didn't want to speak. I asked him if he'd
 276: like to go home, but he declined saying that he was O.K.
 277:
 278: The rest of the lesson I couldn't help but take into account this
 279: guy's emotional state, and I became aware that I was either leaving
 280: him out of class activities, or going very easy on him. I suspect the
 281: other students knew what I was trying to do but they eventually got
 282: frustrated with my 'accommodating' of Jake. Because of his position as
 283: Head Korean within the patriarchal system of male students in the
 284: class, I think that many of the students saw my behaviour as
 285: favoritism. I hope not. It's difficult to know where to go in a
 286: situation like this.
 287:
 288: Thursday, August 07, 1997
 289: I've never had a problem with other teachers observing any of my
 290: classes, however something has come up that has shaken me just
 291: slightly. Last week, the senior teacher in charge of curriculum
 292: development approached me to 'offer' her services as an objective
 293: observer/advice giver in the realms of classroom management. I agreed
 294: to have her observe my class for the first hour on Tuesday morning on
 295: the understanding that we would later discuss some the points that I
 296: inevitably forget to practice in my classroom; concept checking not
 297: the least most forgotten when I get carried away within the
 298: intricacies of simply 'teaching'.
 299:
 300: Whenever I'm observed I try my hardest to relax and just imagine that
 301: the teacher is not there. In fact sometimes I've even tried to involve
 302: the visiting teacher in the running of the class, or at least get
 303: involved in the monitoring of particular students. Of the subsequent
 304: feedback, I've been nothing but totally positive and enthusiastic; at
 305: least until last week. The objectivity of the senior teacher was
 306: always guaranteed to the staff; a senior member who would be available
 307: to all staff who felt they would like some advice and/or constructive
 308: criticism regarding their abilities and performance as teachers. Not a
 309: bad idea! Basically what happened was this; The senior teacher entered
 310: my room, stayed 2 hours, which I considered excessive and even stared
 311: down one of my students who was being just a little insolent. I
 312: thought the idea was that the visiting teacher was to sit, observe and
 313: take notes; get involved yes, as is necessary, but only at the request
 314: of the teacher. Strangely, I found myself being more than observed. I
 315: felt as though the teacher was evaluating me far beyond what could be
 316: considered reasonable for the purposes of 'feedback'. During my session
 317: of observation, a few of the other teaching staff were peering into
 318: my room through the window, giving me little signs of encouragement,
 319: winks and expressions of exasperated disbelief that I had to endure 2
 320: hours of this treatment. Later, discussing the ordeal with others, I
 321: mentioned my feeling of discomfort at being observed so strenuously
 322: and for such a long time, and they also advised me that I wasn't the
 323: only one to have been pressured into this kind of experience.
 324: According to them, it was a common practice of the senior teacher. I
 325: can only hope that the observation and the subsequent feedback I
 326: received, were kept confidential, and not used in any way to affect
 327: the outcome of a possible application for permanency which I'd like to

328: make later this year.

329:

330: Tuesday, August 12, 1997My final insertion to this diary today. I've
331: just finished a month with an EAPs class, some of whom will continue
332: with me into the next module. Constance and I were also delegated into
333: doing Project Work with 2 classes of lower intermediate students for
334: Extension Studies this month. We've certainly learned our lesson
335: regarding the awarding of prizes to students; that will not be
336: happening again this month. We'll run a vote amongst the classes, but
337: I'll be beggared if any senior teacher will make us give any awards
338: again! Just a little note about what happened today. Rightfully, my new
339: EAPs class complained about the number of students crammed into the
340: room(16).

341:

3.8 D8

1: Early May 1997

2: Told by the head teacher, Vicky, my contract to be changed soon on my

3: one year's completion and to expect an observation next week. I decide

4: on Business. I prefer it and it generally goes with more zing than my

5: usual class.

6:

7: 7/5/97

8: Vicky observes class. I've chosen Marketing and Advertising as the

9: students love the focus on sex in ads and I've collected some good

10: examples. Vicky scribbles throughout, laughs uproariously at my

11: reference to 'ladies, does size matter?' as I hold up various phallic

12: perfume bottles. Later she conducts an evaluation interview in rather

13: a rushed fashion, asking the same questions as in January - any

14: problems? Any suggestions as to how to improve things? Where do I see

15: my future with the college? etc. I have forgotten and wish I'd

16: prepared some suitable answers. I comment about lack of communication

17: between management and teachers, it's all top-down. Teachers have no

18: voice. I mention the photocopier queue, it's rather babyish to

19: remember who's before and after you; and having to change seats with

20: change of level (she retorts 'well, some teachers like it!'). I

21: comment that teachers seem to have been given more and more little

22: things to do which encroach on their time. Re my future, I say I'm

23: happy to go on as I am, I'm willing to try anything, and I

24: particularly like Business English and the thought of developing new

25: options.

26:

27: 9/5/97

28: Vicky gives me feedback on my teaching, generally very good. Says I

29: remind her of herself as a teacher (not sure if this is a compliment

30: but presume so). However, she merely reads her written comments to me

31: in a rushed fashion, no eye contact, no real positivism or conviction,

32: a curiously lacklustre delivery. I think: she hasn't had any training

33: in how to give feedback. I assume everything is therefore OK and do

34: not ask.

35:

36: 15/5/97

37: Four teachers told they won't be needed soon as student numbers down -

38: they are the teachers who were expecting it, the most recent arrivals,

39: Jeff, Anna, Jane, and Elise. Jane is particularly peeved, has been

40: there 5 months, trekking in from M. Laura and I (joined on the same

41: day) think we have no reason to be worried because we've been told

42: about our future contract upgrade.

43:

44: Now how do I write about this?

45:

46: 19/5/97 12.40 pm

47:

48: I'm at the copier (no queue!), and the DOS, Simon, says 'could you

49: come into the office please?' I feel a stab of alarm - at this place,

50: being called into the office is not good. I say, 'In one minute'. I

51: catch Laura's eye, I've been summoned! She looks alarmed, she hasn't

52: been. Simon looks polite but shift. He tells me I won't be needed

53: after 6/6/97 as numbers are down. I am aghast, my thoughts are racing

54: - can I survive 6-7 weeks without work until numbers pick up? I ask,
 55: was there anything wrong with my observation? No, very good, we'll
 56: give you a reference. But isn't there some tour work coming up? I
 57: query. He looks vague, yes, a Thai tour in July... his eye contact is
 58: poor and his manner very hesitant. What about Laura's position? I ask,
 59: is it secure? Well, no, he replies hesitantly (this makes me feel a
 60: bit better). I stagger out of the office and tell Laura (not about
 61: her position though) and she is amazed. I tell the other teachers at
 62: my table who are shocked. I go to my class at 1 pm in a daze and tell
 63: them I have to leave in three weeks. They are concerned and ask what I
 64: will do. I muddle through the lesson and gradually it dawns on me that
 65: this doesn't add up.
 66:
 67: 2.45
 68:
 69: I go into Vicky, by now rather angry. Simon is talking to Lydia in the
 70: office. I say to Vicky: why tell me my contract is up for change when
 71: all along there was the risk of being laid off? She looks angry and
 72: defensive and utters something I will never forget: 'Well, up until
 73: the time I observed you, that was the case. But then you gave answers
 74: that were different from everybody else's'. I feel a germ of alarm
 75: spreading. I say something about the policy of last in, first out, she
 76: says, oh no, that's not the case. She says I'll have to talk to Simon.
 77: I come back when he's free and the door is firmly closed - this is a
 78: most ominous sign. I ask, what is all this about? Vicky resumes: your
 79: answers were different. You have problems with the organisation, you
 80: found the situation in the staffroom puerile. Everyone else talked
 81: about teaching problems but you criticised the organisation. I say:
 82: but I don't have any problems with teaching! I am growing more
 83: incredulous by the minute, I can't believe that I'm hearing. Vicky
 84: passes the buck to Simon to continue, which is funny because he
 85: doesn't really know me. Simon says nervously looking at Vicky (this
 86: man's eye contact is hopeless). 'We perceive you have an attitude
 87: problem'. I ask, have I ever not done what was required of me? No, he
 88: replies, but sometimes you behaved with bad grace. I can feel the
 89: reality of the room and the moment slipping and sliding all over the
 90: place, this can't be happening? I ask for an example. He looks at
 91: Vicky and says hesitantly, 'When Maria (social organiser) comes into
 92: your class, she sometimes feels unwelcome'. My mouth actually drops
 93: open. I'm go because Maria feels unwelcome! Somewhere Vicky comments
 94: that I question things and tend to be negative. I ask: how long would
 95: you have let me believe I was going because of the numbers? She
 96: replies: we'd have told you, we knew you would come in here like this!
 97:
 98: I go back to the substance of the criticisms I made and point out that
 99: there isn't much communication between teachers and management, and I
 100: feel teachers should have a say. Simon agrees and warbles : oh! yes,
 101: it's the teachers' democratic right to speak up about things. My
 102: amazement increases further and I reply: but isn't that what I did and
 103: look where it got me? He looks as if he has lost the plot and doesn't
 104: reply, just looks to Vicky to take it from there. I ask was there
 105: anything wrong with my teaching? No, says Simon, but we don't just
 106: want good teachers at [name of college], we want people who will
 107: support the ethos of the College and roll with change.
 108:

109: I'm now trying to picture my future and ask: where does this leave me
 110: regarding relief work, will you use me? Simon looks at Vicky (for
 111: inspiration?) and says hesitantly: well, no..... I get more alarmed.
 112: What about another [name of parent organisation] college? I ask. This
 113: time a direct 'No'. Suddenly, the bottom is falling out of my world.
 114: Within the space of two hours they have moved from laying me off
 115: because the numbers are down to dismissal with the bonus of a black
 116: ban. The danger of not working again in the industry looms - my
 117: brilliant career over in ten months. Somehow, intuitively, I protest:
 118: You can't do this! IF you perceived an attitude problem, you should
 119: have identified it and nipped it in the bud; sat me down and discussed
 120: it, and given me time to shape up or ship out. An attitude can be
 121: changed! There is a silence. My last statement hangs in the air. Both
 122: Simon and Vicky now look as if they are making up the script as they
 123: go along. Simon says: we will take that to management. I feel somehow
 124: relieved that there is room for negotiation. I leave.
 125:
 126: I find Laura in the kitchen and tell her: I'm going because I have an
 127: attitude problem, I gave the wrong answers! There is a hot pressure
 128: inside my head, I'm almost in tears, I'm trying to drink a glass of
 129: water for no particular reason but it won't go down. Mary comes around
 130: the corner to stickleback and Gillian arrives - they have not missed the
 131: significance of the closed door. We are discussing this when Vicky
 132: arrives, so we all melt away.
 133:
 134: I walk to my car in a daze and drive. [place name] flashes by, a blur
 135: of carefree tourists, ocean, cafes, seagulls. The previous day my
 136: students were watching [news program] about miners being laid off at Q.
 137: A burly 50-something union rep said grimly to the camera: there'll be
 138: suicides over this. At the time I thought: oh! come on, don't be
 139: melodramatic! As I manoeuvre my car into my units, I see this man
 140: saying those words and I realise how a person feels when they are
 141: 50-something and they are sacked - no future, no identity, just swept
 142: aside, nothing. This isn't happening, it's not real. During the
 143: evening I still cannot believe it. It is actually five hours before I
 144: cry and go to bed in tears.
 145:
 146: 20/5/97 2 am
 147: I wake up with a start and the first thing I think is: oh God, it's
 148: true, I've been sacked. How humiliating! I can't go back to sleep at
 149: all.
 150:
 151: 20/5/97
 152: I gradually tell people or people know. The teachers are shocked and
 153: disgusted, whispering in corners. The feeling is 'They've done it
 154: again (a la Mary) - they can't get away with it'. In the afternoon
 155: Vicky says diffidently that they have written down what was discussed
 156: and someone will talk to me about it soon. I find that management is
 157: away on some overseas junket so it will have to be Tracy. The next day
 158: I'm informed she will see me on Thursday, that's three days from the
 159: original shock.
 160:
 161: 22/5/97 - 2.45 pm
 162: To Tracy's office. No sign of any written statement - doubt one was
 163: ever made. She looks at me, says something like: well, how do you want

164: to handle this? And blow me down, she fixes her gaze on some distant
 165: point of the million-dollar horizon and starts with: 'the numbers are
 166: down, it's very much a numbers business at this time of the year'. I'm
 167: dumbfounded, not again! I stated very firmly: 'I understand the
 168: numbers issue entirely, but we're talking about two quite separate
 169: things here. What about the 'attitude problem'? I explain the only
 170: flimsy example they have given me of this and ask her to give me
 171: something clearer. She looks away and says she can't, I'll have to go
 172: back to Vicky and Simon for that, but talking about that won't get us
 173: anywhere right now (?? Why not?). She bumbles on about the opportunity
 174: to get experience elsewhere, this is my first ESL position (What does
 175: this have to do with anything?). I say: what about not being used for
 176: relief work and being unwelcome at another [name of parent
 177: organisation] college? She looks surprised and says hesitantly that I
 178: shouldn't have been told that, and that she would inform Vicky and
 179: Simon to that effect (I think this is news to her). She wanders along,
 180: saying who knows? with a few more years' experience I might return to
 181: [name of college]. I decide to mention me recent stressors I've been
 182: under, I'm not proud; minor surgery in January, worried about a
 183: concern scare; my father's death in early March (only took one day
 184: off for the funeral): and giving up smoking at Easter - all of which
 185: was known to Vicky and Simon. I freely admit I might not have always
 186: been cheerful in the staffroom but I never missed a beat in the
 187: classroom. She acknowledges this in good, reflective, counselling
 188: style ('I'll take that on board') - but she isn't going to budge. I
 189: ask: hypothetically, if 50 new students arrived tomorrow, what would
 190: you do with me? She says with hesitation, well, I guess we'd use you,
 191: but at the same time I would encourage you to seek work elsewhere. She
 192: reiterates that I'll be given a telephone reference. (How do I know
 193: what sort? How will I ever know I'll be used for relief?). I realise
 194: she has never at any stage been prepared to really listen and
 195: negotiate. I say: so I've been sacked because Maria feels unwelcome.
 196: She says: I don't want you to feel sacked! Don't feel sacked! I say:
 197: excuse me, but I do feel sacked. I can feel myself starting to lose
 198: control and don't want to look a silly, weak female in front of her.
 199: As we walk out she pats me reassuringly, almost strokes me arm, I walk
 200: out savagely and abruptly, blundering to the lift in tears. Just
 201: before we concluded, a female voice interrupted us on her intercom,
 202: saying 'Tracy, how long will you be? We've got an emergency on our
 203: hands out here'. And I thought : 'Good! And I hope you have many
 204: more!'
 205:
 206: I stop off at the ladies' to repair my contact lenses which don't take
 207: well to tears. Recommendation: if you want to stay in control at all
 208: times, wear contacts; impossible to cry gracefully! Into the
 209: staffroom, empty except for Laura. She asks: are you OK? I say I'm not
 210: . Tell her briefly, that's it, I'm gone. Then she says (dumb and
 211: dumber, Laura): Why are you so upset? I'm so stunned as such as stupid
 212: questions that I stop crying momentarily and snap out: because I
 213: really thought we could discuss this, get some time to sort it out,
 214: whatever this 'attitude' problem was. I realise that's why I hadn't
 215: fallen completely apart before, I was holding out for negotiation. I
 216: drive home in a daze and cry myself to sleep.
 217:
 218: 23/5/97

219: Excursion day. I awake with a colossal headache, can't lift my head
 220: up, eyes all puffy. My students are going with four other classes and
 221: needn't depend on my being there so I call E at home at 7 am and
 222: she'll look after them. A day's pay lost, and I really wanted to go
 223: with them. They're a great bunch. I take any pill that I think will
 224: improve the situation, put on my eyemask and earplugs and sleep until
 225: lunchtime. The rest of the day I'm a drained zombie. (Tautology?)
 226:
 227: Weekend
 228: Trouble coping with reality. I find I can sleep only if it's the
 229: weekend. As soon as I wake at 2 am and realise it's a work day - no
 230: more sleep. I decide I must behave with as much good grace as possible
 231: (no more 'bad grace'!) and work out the two weeks remaining. Really I
 232: want to stop right now, but they might use that against me somehow.
 233:
 234: Monday
 235: To doctor for sleeping pills and something for my permanent headache.
 236: I've never taken a sleeping pill in my life before (another learning
 237: curve) and am expecting to go out like a light; to my horror I still
 238: wake at 2 but don't seem to care as much.
 239:
 240: 28/5/97
 241: There are now large holes in my consciousness. I am on automatic
 242: pilot. Today I walked all the way from College to my care to find no
 243: handbag on my shoulder. panic. Did someone snatch it and I didn't
 244: even notice? I walk back. It is on the floor of the staffroom. I have
 245: never, ever forgotten my bag before. I consider the symbolism of this:
 246: my handbag is my identity, it contains all the possessions that define
 247: me, and I lose it.
 248:
 249: Today two teachers left (Mika, Bill - Bill is getting out of teaching,
 250: I wonder why?). At the farewell lunch, flowers etc. I suddenly think,
 251: how will I leave? Will there be flowers shoved at me like Vicky did
 252: for Beth? Will I have the courage to give them back? Teachers come to
 253: me after lunch and say: you must have felt very awkward.
 254:
 255: Friday
 256: I have given up on the sleeping pills and try to sleep when I can.
 257: Today after work I rang [regulatory body] to tell them my tale of woe.
 258: A very sympathetic lady listens and says: Sandra must see that she
 259: can't do this. I feel better, and listened to. I also call the Union;
 260: of course, I wasn't in the union, was I? Was going to join when I was
 261: more 'permanent'. They advise me I can represent myself in an unfair
 262: dismissal case. I tell them that at the recent union meeting teachers
 263: felt unable to speak up about an issue because Vicky was present - and
 264: now I learn she is not even in the union! What am I uncovering here?
 265: What can of worms?
 266:
 267: I reflect that really I am quite proud that at the age of 51, going on
 268: 52, I have been dismissed for 'attitude'. Move over, rebellious youth.
 269:
 270: I decided to read the Award carefully, as the idea of doing something
 271: about this is taking hold. Up to now, I have been numb. Lo and behold,
 272: the Award has disappeared! I am forced to ask Vicky where it is, so
 273: she knows I'm up to something. Well, if she thought I had attitude,

274: what can she expect - here it comes, baby. Finally the Award turns up
 275: in Peter's brief case; has he been poring over it to see where they
 276: went wrong? I gleefully take it home for the weekend.
 277:
 278: Weekend
 279: I read the Award from cover to cover and find I was quite correct in
 280: what I told them: they have clearly breached the section dealing with
 281: disputes. I should have been told if they perceived a problem, and
 282: been given 'a suitable and reasonable' time to rectify it. I also
 283: discover that since March 12th they have underpaid us!
 284:
 285: Final week
 286: There is a curious sense of unreality about work. The students know
 287: the real reason I am leaving. I'm not going to bullshit them, there's
 288: enough of that going on here. Besides, they're not daft; as one said,
 289: the numbers might go down but we'll still need a teachers on Monday
 290: morning. Two Czech girls as me for coffee: when I get outside the
 291: building, I find about ten current and former students who give me a
 292: cheer! Some of my old students from last October are even there. They
 293: present me with a silver bracelet. My faith in myself as a teacher is
 294: restored - I had well and truly lost it. Felt I couldn't care less if
 295: I never taught again. My imminent departure seems to have acted as a
 296: catalyst for these students who have lots of grievances about [name of
 297: college] anyway. They want to send a petition to the college and I'm
 298: really touched; also, a general letter of complaint. I tell them what
 299: they choose to do is their business but that I am very pleased at
 300: their support.
 301:
 302: Amazingly, I have not relapsed with smoking; I have simply become an
 303: alcoholic!
 304:
 305: Tuesday: Kevin informs me he is taking over my class! (Note - isn't
 306: this Vicky's duty?) He is clearly ill at ease in telling me and I'm
 307: not surprised - he joined [name of college] three months ago! I go to
 308: Vicky and have to ask who is going to take my Business class? She
 309: says: William. I have to try very hard indeed not to let my mouth fall
 310: open. William has been there on one module. I believe he's one of the
 311: recent arrivals who doesn't have a degree, a fact that Maurine was
 312: bemoaning. Well, there goes the numbers theory and the
 313: last-in/first-out theory. My humiliation is complete and Vicky knows
 314: it. I behave this week with impeccable good grace, but it costs me
 315: enormously inside. The other teachers are amazed at my successors, and
 316: also my fortitude.
 317:
 318: One of my students had to consult Vicky today, and she mentioned how
 319: shocked and surprised she was that I was leaving. Vicky's answer:
 320: unfortunately the numbers are down, and we're very sorry to see her
 321: go! Choke, choke. How dare that overgrown Vicky with the limp hair and
 322: grating vowels stand and deliver such utter hypocritical crap! My
 323: student had to hide her smile.
 324:
 325: After work I ring Legal Aid to ask for the name of a solicitor. They
 326: give me Robert's name in [place name] and I ring him and discuss unfair
 327: dismissal. I know I only have 21 days from the sacking date to lodge
 328: this, and my 21 days will expire on Monday [date]. I make an

329: appointment to see him next day.
330:
331: Wednesday
332: Vicky asks me if I'm staying to attend the staff meeting which is
333: about developing course material. I think to myself, that would have
334: to be the bloody stupid questions you have ever asked! I exit to the
335: solicitor's, where I find to my dismay that people defined as casuals
336: are excluded from lodging unfair dismissal claims, and the definition
337: of casual has been redefined in the legislation of January 1996 as
338: someone working for up to 52 weeks; previously it was 6 months. Robert
339: and I discuss my teaching and the fact that in practicality it was far
340: from casual, ie not irregular, informal, nor uncertain; he makes some
341: clarifying calls to Industrial Relations and we decide to lodge the
342: claim anyway (\$50!). Robert charges the bare minimum, \$120 per hour, I
343: decide my next career should be law. I have to write a brief annexure
344: outlining the circumstances of the dismissal which I wish I had more
345: time to do; in the space where the form asks what I want, I tick the
346: box marked 'reinstatement' and 'other', ie some monetary compensation.
347: I do not expect the papers to reach [name of college] for a while. I
348: go home feeling better, I have done something finally and the ball is
349: rolling. The next day I tell people I have taken legal action and the
350: reaction is: about time someone did it to them! I feel an almost
351: savage pleasure in taking them on.
352:
353: Friday - D-Day
354: A totally appropriate date which I will always remember as a
355: definitive moment in my personal war. Robert Taylor and Richard Todd,
356: eat your hearts out! Thank heavens, neither Simon nor Vicky are there,
357: off at some meeting, so I am spared the hypocrisy. Nine or ten
358: teachers go to lunch with Anna and I, we are given flowers and cards.
359: Sadly, since Vicky has signed the card, few felt able to write what
360: they really wanted to on the card (they confirm this) , although
361: Nicole has written 'well, we never thought a year ago we would end up
362: like this!'
363:
364: I would have loved to read their real thoughts. Anna and I have missed
365: signing each other's card, so do so at lunch; she writes: 'don't let
366: the bastards get you down - just remember, not every workplace is as
367: 'dirty' as this one'. A strange incident on the way back from lunch;
368: Sandra, obviously back from overseas, is talking to someone outside
369: the college. She gives me a seraphic smile. I am stunned, debate
370: whether to ignore her , then give a bland smile in return.
371:
372: After my class , I realise I do not know what the etiquette for
373: leaving under my circumstances is. I decide on the utmost civility. I
374: return my key to Vicky and offer my hand. She is clearly nervous and
375: surprised, and shakes hands, wishing me good luck. I walk out
376: thinking, me one, Vicky nil.
377:
378: Have to ring Robert about writing to the College asking them to
379: negotiate so as to avoid even going to conciliation, and to my
380: surprise find that they have already faxed the claim for unfair
381: dismissal the previous day. So Sandra knew about it when she smiled at
382: me. So what did the smile mean? You silly fool? Since I'm legally
383: excluded from claiming at this stage, we don't write the letter;

384: Robert advises me to wait and see what they do, unfortunately not my
 385: style.
 386:
 387: Tuesday
 388: Had a peculiarly vacant long weekend, as if I knew it was the
 389: beginning of the very long week. Today the horror of the reality
 390: starts to sink in a little. I go to the doctor; I've decided to get a
 391: certificate so that I don't have to look for work for a week or so for
 392: DSS purposes. When it come to it, I do actually feel quite ill, it
 393: has all caught up with me. Three weeks of insomnia and headache have
 394: taken their toll, plus other symptoms. The doctor explains that the
 395: 'holes' in my consciousness, where I just seem to drop out from being
 396: me but still function automatically (a bit of a hazard when driving!)
 397: are merely signs of stress. He gives me a certificate for two weeks
 398: for 'nervous reaction to loss of job'.
 399:
 400: Laura rings after work, and in that zany, yahoo style Yankee style
 401: squawks 'so how was your first day of freedom?' I am instantly
 402: offended and somewhat frosty in my reply. Maybe it's the age
 403: difference, but I don't think she has the faintest idea of how this
 404: feels. Actually, I don't think anyone has unless it's happened to
 405: them.
 406:
 407: Thursday
 408:
 409: I have coffee with a student (Czech) who has organised the petition.
 410: So sweet, it has been signed by a dozen of them, and they wanted to
 411: check (no pun intended) the wording for me. I think they have put it
 412: most succinctly: 'We would like to express our concern and dismay over
 413: her dismissal ... excellent lesson preparation... made us feel very
 414: relaxed and comfortable... helped us reached a sound level of
 415: English... it therefore seems very strange that your school can afford
 416: to lose such an excellent teacher and person such as me'. Got it in a
 417: nutshell, that last part. Very strange indeed. What does the College
 418: think it is achieving? Protecting future students from my terrible
 419: attitude?
 420:
 421: Some students have also prepared a letter of specific complaints about
 422: their dealing with the college - two have had relatives and friends
 423: who attended the College earlier and found it much better then than
 424: now. I recommend they do not send the letter until the final student
 425: has left in case they make their lives a misery. I also tell them it
 426: might be better to send it to [name of parent organisation] in
 427: [overseas place name] - no point in complaining to [name of college],
 428: it doesn't get you anywhere. I will search out the address as I may
 429: also do the same once my legal action is concluded.
 430:
 431: 15/6/97
 432: I have coffee with another student, Swiss-German. He has already
 433: finished at [name of college] and was most dissatisfied. He complained
 434: and had an interview with Sandra and Vicky, but as he remarked
 435: astutely, 'I didn't every get any feedback on my feedback'. He offers
 436: to come with me if I need someone to support me in negotiating with
 437: them, which touches me. Very chivalrous.
 438:

439: 17/6/97

440: The College was legally supposed to respond to the papers within 7
441: days, but so far nothing. I get a notice from The Australian
442: Industrial Relations Commission that the hearing preliminary
443: conciliation hearing has been set down for 11/7/97, the day before my
444: birthday. Happy birthday, me, this will be a memorable one.
445:

446: 24/6/97

447: the AIRC faxes that the hearing has been cancelled there will now be a
448: callover matter relating solely to the jurisdictional issue (whether
449: as a casual I am entitled to claim). When I see 'Dobson v [name of
450: college]' I get a chill feeling, this is horribly real new. How much
451: is symbolised by that single little 'v'. Battle lines are now drawn.
452:

453: 30/6/97

454: Waiting for the callover on 2/7/97 is ghastly. I couldn't have been in
455: a job for the life of me, this millstone weights me down so much. Time
456: seems to drag, I feel as if I'm perpetually waiting for something, and
457: something bad at that. Wednesdays are the worst. I ring friends and
458: get only answer machines. Time seems to stop, I reach moments when I
459: absolutely cannot do anything except look out of the window and think
460: of everyone else getting on with their lives, going about their daily
461: business. I have taken up smoking again, this time simply because it
462: fills up time, gives you the impression you are doing something, and
463: I'm allowing myself to do anything that will make me feel better.
464:

465: 2/7/97

466: The day dawns. Amazingly I slept last night. I toddle off to the city
467: and have a coffee new the Commission. Sandra and Tracy walk in which
468: startles me. I think they deliberately ignore me. They have faxed to
469: Robert a copy of my contract - and they have added dates to make it
470: look like I was contracted to finish on 6/6/97! Of course the dates
471: were not sighted by me. In the foyer of the Commission, I say abruptly
472: to Sandra: I've never seen that before. The hearing takes about 30
473: minutes. Sandra does not seem to have sought legal advice (or
474: representation) and waffles on about short term contracts and the
475: seasonal nature of the business. She doesn't seem to realise the sole
476: issue under discussion is the nature of the work 'casual'.
477:

478: She states categorically: Ms Dobson came to the end of her contract,
479: it wasn't dismissal, you Honour. I am appalled. So this is what they
480: are going to insist to their graves? Numbers down, end of contract,
481: not sacked? Their graves can't come soon enough for me. I am actually
482: sworn in to corroborate my statement of service. I wasn't expecting
483: this and my blood pressure goes soaring. I can feel my heart beating
484: so fast in the witness box. I am able to say with some satisfaction re
485: the fudged contract, 'I've never seen it before'. Sandra waffles on
486: about the paperwork belatedly not catching up with me. How anyone
487: could have known on 24/4/97 that I was to terminate on 6/6/97 - in the
488: middle of the module to boot - is beyond me, and I hope that
489: commissioner saw this as the cover-up it was. Generally Robert comes
490: across as very well prepared and researched, and sticking to the legal
491: issues only. Sandra looks a bit silly and has to have things explained
492: to her. Tracy sits like a blob throughout. The commissioner reserves
493: her decision and says she will hand it down the following week.

494:

495: 3/7/97 I have two interviews, one with Mary, who was sacked from [name
496: of college], and one with Malcolm who hired me at [name of college]
497: originally. Irony of ironies! Should we start a club for those who
498: have left [name of college]. At least this takes away my concern about
499: getting a good reference; so far I haven't needed one.

500:

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

517:

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

528:

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

539:

540:

541: