

CHAPTER 1



Modes of Inquiry

We view teachers' lives in schools as highly complex and multifaceted, with the lounge as one component in this complexity. We made two deliberate decisions: First, we decided to gain insights into the lounge environment by using a variety of modes of inquiry, which enabled us to tackle our subject from different and complementary perspectives. This decision supported our second decision, namely, to view all the material we accumulated as "text," which would then have to be interpreted in different ways. Though stemming from different sources, these interpretations yield a composite and valid portrait of the teachers' lounge, derived from the following ways of inquiry.

Observations

The organizational features of Israeli schools provided us with a perfect setting for inquiring into the various aspects of life in teachers' lounges, the room where teachers were apt to spend significant chunks of their time in school. We started our study with extended periods of observations in different schools in order to get a sense of the environment in which teachers interact during breaks or free periods. We view this physical environment as having a potential impact on their perceptions and feelings concerning their lounges (see appendix I).

Altogether, twenty-six different lounges in high schools were observed by us and by a study group of ten graduate students who served as research assistants. Each lounge was visited three or four times and was observed on each occasion during all breaks and free periods. During the visits to the lounges, sketches and photographs of the physical environment were prepared focusing on external features, such as the arrangement of tables and chairs, as well as the use of the walls as communication channels between school administration and teachers.

Through the videotaping of a full day in a teachers' lounge in one high school, we created a record of the professional and social life there, including the talk, the sounds of voices, the rhythm of movements, and the ebb and flow of groups forming and dispersing. The videotape and the recorded observations constitute texts which are analyzed and presented in different chapters of this book.

Throughout our study we were sensitive and attentive to the voices of the major participants in the life of lounges, i.e., teachers and principals. The voice of the teachers is that of adults defining their place within a social organization and working community, in our case, teachers' lounges.

Interviews

We conducted in-depth interviews with forty teachers and twelve principals who were chosen at random from the teachers and principals in the observed schools. These interviews provided us with insights into how teachers and principals perceive the characteristics of their lounges and their possible impact on school life.

We decided to adopt an additional mode of listening to teachers, assuming that by writing for us in the form of monologues about their experiences they would help us uncover further aspects of life in lounges.

Monologues

We asked teachers to respond to a call for submitting written monologues concerning their experiences in the

teachers' lounge. We assumed that through the monologues written under the heading of "My Life in the Teachers' Lounge," each teacher would be able to express his or her true feelings without the intervention of a researcher. A monologue is an autonomous unit of discourse. It is a complete unit of statements that can be used in order to understand the meanings assigned by the writer to the object related to, in our case "the lounge." Fifty-three monologues were obtained at random as we sent out a "call for monologues" that invited this writing. The response was extensive: It included primary and high school teachers, as well as student teachers. They constituted a separate group of respondents in our study. All the monologues were analyzed and part of this analysis is presented in chapter 5.

The Questionnaire

A questionnaire composed of two parts was compiled on the basis of the preliminary interviews with teachers:

- (A) A list of twenty characteristics of lounges (e.g., "noisy"; "pleasant atmosphere"; "competitive environment"; "lessons are prepared"; "a place to talk with students") was provided. Teachers were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale the appropriateness of each characteristic as describing their own teachers' lounge (range 1–5; 1 indicating "not true or very seldom true for the teachers' lounge in my school" and 5 indicating "very often true for the teachers' lounge in my school").
- (B) Teachers were asked to assess the perceived impact of teachers' lounges on ten school-related domains (e.g., "improving school climate"; "developing interpersonal relationship between teachers"; "developing educational activities"). Responses were on a Likert-type scale (range 1–5; 1 indicating "no impact" and 5 indicating "great impact"). The questionnaire also included an open-ended section in which they were asked to elaborate on some of their

experiences in the lounge and to suggest some metaphors they considered appropriate to describe this room (see appendix II).

The structure of teacher responses to part A of the questionnaire was first examined by employing a factor analysis based on principal components and a varimax rotation of extracted factors. The factor analysis provides a useful and concise summary of responses to individual items, clustered in meaningful groups (factors) based on the pattern of item interrelations.

Factor analysis was also employed in part B of the questionnaire, which focused on perceived spheres of the influence of lounges on school life. The emerging scale was correlated with the factors of lounge characteristics in order to establish a link between the perceived functions of these rooms and the amount of influence teachers attribute to their particular lounge.

Four hundred and nine elementary school teachers (95 percent female) responded to the questionnaire. Most of the teachers were from urban schools (84 percent) and had a mean of twelve years ($SD = 7.7$) of teaching experience and a mean of seven years ($SD = 5.6$) in their current school. On average, they reported five workdays per week ($SD = 1$) and visited their lounges more than twice a day ($SD = 1$). The time that teachers actually spent in the lounge exceeded one hour (three recesses), and whenever they had an unscheduled free period. The data collected for this part of our study was one component in a larger survey conducted in nineteen elementary schools in Israel, thus providing us with an opportunity to expand our study in additional ways.

The nineteen elementary schools were part of a statewide testing endeavor in math and reading comprehension of elementary students. Data on students' academic achievement in two standard tests, one in math and one in reading comprehension, were collected for each school in the study, aggregated to the school level. These tests had been administered by the Ministry of Education in grades 3 and 5 in all elementary schools in Israel. Based on test results

the nineteen schools in our study were divided into two groups: low-achieving and high-achieving, according to their place below or above the average test score. Because the correlation between math and reading test scores was about .9, the results were averaged across the two subjects. In low-achievement schools (8 schools, 181 teachers), the average failure rate was 42 percent, while in high achievement schools (11 schools, 228 teachers), the average failure rate was 14 percent. The two groups of schools were quite comparable with respect to size, teacher-to-student ratio, as well as physical characteristics such as relative classroom space (from total school space) and space per student.

We investigated the patterns of teachers' perception of their lounges in low- versus high-achievement schools.

Two empirical questions guided our data analysis in this section:

1. Are there differences between the teachers in low- and high-achievement schools regarding their perceptions of the teachers' lounge functions?
2. How do teachers in low- and in high-achievement schools associate the teachers' lounge functions with specific domains of influence on school life?

In order to answer the first question, we compared the mean scores of the three lounge functions, and the influence scale, between the two groups of teachers.

To further address the question of links between the perceived functions of teachers' lounges and their influence on school life, we calculated for teachers in low- and in high-achievement schools, separately, correlation between each function score, and the ten items describing specific domains of influence. Although individual items reflect a general influence factor, it was considered especially important to go into such level of detail in order to shed more light on differences between low- versus high-achievement schools.

Our analysis of the questionnaires was based on accepted statistical procedures which provided us with the basis for our emerging concepts concerning life in the teachers'

lounge on the one hand, and on the other, the relationship between events in the lounge and in the classroom.

The Notion of Text and its Uses

The intention of integrating different modes of inquiry and orientations in our study led us to refer to the variety of sources for our data as text. A text has to be interpreted in order to get a sense of the inherent nature of an event, discourse, or character. We were interested in gaining insights into the nature of the teachers' lounge. In other words, our methodological approach is based on the interpretative paradigm.

Our aim is to direct and concentrate the attention of the reader to specific events, objects, ideas, and interactions within the lounge. Analyzing the varied texts from many perspectives serves the process of creating knowledge which emerges from the composition of all these perspectives.

Text is a concept easier to characterize than to define. Usually the concept text means the written words: a group of sentences which, when put together, serves to express an idea. We can also refer to text in a wider meaning, based on the distinction between the common notion of text that we have just mentioned, and the theatrical text. The theatrical text has a wider meaning. Thus the distinction will be formulated as follows: "the world created through words will be called *the theatrical text, i.e., the performance of a play, the production, as opposed to the written literary text*" (Schonmann 1995, p. 176).

For the purpose of the analysis in the following chapters, we will refer to the teachers' lounge as a place in which multiple texts originate. We give meaning to the texts through our interpretations and thus create a multifaceted portrait of life in lounges. Giving interpretation to text is the art of applying one's frame of reference as opposed to directly participating in the events. Interpretation is an act everyone is involved in while dealing with text. "It is the way of adding, or subtracting from a direct communication" (Spolin 1973, p. 384). It is the essence of any analysis which

aims to give meaning to data. In his book, *Is There a Text in This Class*, Stanley Fish described the mental processes we employ while reading text. He claims: "The place where sense is made or not made is the reader's mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of the book" (Fish 1980, p. 21).

Interpretation can be made from several points of view. When analyzing text from a dramatic point of view we employ dramatic concepts, such as "dramatic tension," "conventions," "the fourth wall," "catharsis," "time and timing," "place and space"; these are all elements which help give meaning to the experience in the teachers' lounge and are elaborated in the relevant chapters in this book. The researcher's work is to find the reality beyond the text and to help the reader understand the narrator's perspective.

Our Role as Researchers

The "fourth wall" is a theatre convention that facilitates the suspension of disbelief, and contributes to the make-believe world of the play. In her book, *Welcome to the Theatre*, Boyce (1987) indicates that,

The stage is enclosed on three sides, which often constitute the walls of the set, in which there are doors and windows. The fourth wall is an invisible barrier through which the audience views the play. Originally, in plays performed on a proscenium stage, the performers did not acknowledge the presence of the audience. The play progressed while the audience eavesdropped on the performance via the invisible fourth wall. This provided a separation of audience and actor that was thought to be desirable. This fourth wall concept provided a psychological barrier helpful to both the actor and audience. (p. 22)

The convention of the "fourth wall" allows the audience to feel like unseen observers who watch the events on the stage as if they were part of reality. When the illusion of reality is

achieved, the spectators tend to feel great empathy toward the figures on the stage.

We borrowed the “fourth wall” convention for our inquiry as one mode of observation, which gave us the advantage of feeling that we were “seeing but not being seen.” We watched, listened, and noted our impressions. After a while, we felt a need to take part in the situation. We continued to follow the concept of the “fourth wall,” but now played the role of an active audience by introducing our video camera into the teachers’ lounge. At the start, the result of our interference in the flow of teachers’ lives in their collective private room caused tense acting and behavior, but this happened only at the beginning. After a while, when the teachers got used to us and lost interest in our presence, it became possible to peep through the “fourth wall” while being fully aware that there were boundaries between actors, namely the teachers, and the audience, ourselves, the researchers. The boundaries were well understood albeit invisible, and encouraged us as the audience to limit our participation in the process we observed, and to behave as if we were spectators at a play.

Everybody knew about us and we knew about them, but the events in the lounge continued without our active input. Sometimes we felt a strong desire to join in or to speak to the teachers, but at this stage of our observations we agreed to keep to the “fourth wall” convention and stay as silent observers only. We were observers in the sense of watching a play. In *Hamlet*, for example, when some viewers reach the scene where Polonius is hiding behind the curtains, they often feel a strong desire to shout out and warn both of them, “Beware, Polonius!” or, “Hamlet, don’t do it; it’s Polonius—not the king.” To do so, of course, would destroy the illusion for the rest of the audience and, as a spectator, one must not lose sight of the convention which keeps us at a distance.

Concluding Comments

In spite of the localized context of our study, we invite the reader to examine the insights gained concerning

teacher development and communities of adults in schools. This first chapter introduces the reader to our research paradigm, its substantive and syntactic structure. The life in teachers' lounges is perceived as a text to be decoded and interpreted. The notion of text played out in the lounge led us to employ dramatic concepts, such as "conventions" and "catharsis," which help us give meaning to the experiences in teachers' lounges. We found the "fourth wall" convention useful for describing our own role as researchers: feeling, seeing but not seen, like spectators at a play. We were intrigued by the teachers' own perceptions of their lounges and employed a variety of research methods to gain insights into these perceptions. Though we saw the lounge as a separate niche in the culture of schools, we were interested in the possible relationships between life in the lounge and the teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. Therefore, we investigated the patterns of teachers' perceptions of their lounges in the low- versus high-achievement schools that had participated in statewide tests in math and reading.

The various modes of inquiry led us to observe teachers' lounges as a place in which a subculture is created. We agree with Bruner who showed that education is a "complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture" (Bruner 1996, p. 43).

In the following chapters we would like to share and discuss these ways of viewing and thinking about how teachers create their own subculture to fit their social and professional knowledge.

CHAPTER 2



Social Situations

Studying life in classrooms raises several questions concerning the social situation developing in this environment: Is the myth of the lonely teacher still valid? Which elements constitute the social situation in the lounge? What norms are reflected in teachers' interactions in the lounge? We will attempt to propose some answers to these questions, starting with the myth of the lonely teacher.

The Myth of the Lonely Teacher

The inside stories of lounges, revealing norms of discourse and behavior, friendships and power struggles, and tense as well as relaxed moments, constitute the social situation of lounges. Viewing the social situations as an essential component of the professional lives of teachers, we challenge the widespread notion that teaching is a lonely profession. This idea has survived more than three decades (Jackson 1968; Lortie 1975; Dreeben 1970).

Our basic assumption is that teachers' lounges constitute a unique territory in the educational environment of schools. By its definition the lounge belongs to the teachers, and the activities that occur within its walls reflect the links between them. On the basis of this assumption we argue against some of Lortie's statements in *Schoolteacher* (1975):

Relationships with other adults do not stand at the heart of teachers' psychological world. (p. 187)

Although Lortie was aware of the complex relationships among teachers, he did not examine the teachers' lounge, which we believe is a central site for deciphering these relationships. While trying to avoid simplification of describing teachers in either-or terms, he drew the following picture:

The cellular form of school organization, and the attendant time and space ecology, puts interactions between teachers at the margin of their daily work. Individualism characterizes their socialization . . . It seems that teachers can work effectively without the active assistance of colleagues, since teacher-teacher interaction does not seem to play a critical part in the work life of our respondents. (p. 192)

Lortie claimed that being shaped by deeper commitments to students, the relationships teachers have with other adults are secondary, and derivative in nature. Goodlad and Klein (1970) made a similar claim:

It would appear that teachers are very much alone in their work. It is not just a matter of being alone, all alone with children in a classroom cell, although this is a significant part of their aloneness. Rather, it is the feeling and in large measure the actuality—of not being supported by someone who knows about their work, who is sympathetic to it, who wants to help and, indeed, does help. This is, in part, an unhappy consequence of the inviolate status of the classroom and the assumed autonomy of the teacher in it. This aloneness becomes poignant in the face of problems which, clearly, cannot be solved by the individual teacher alone. (pp. 93–94)

It is possible that for many teachers the loneliness in their classroom overshadows any social interactions in the teachers' lounge. We are aware of the wide diversity among schools at different age levels and in different cultures in which these descriptions might be valid. Still, we question

these suppositions by asking whether this description of the characteristics of the profession in the 1970s is still accurate and holds in the reality of school culture nowadays with its growing emphasis on professional communities of teachers? We examine this question by investigating teachers' relationships with peers as reflected in social situations in teachers' lounges.

The Social Actions

The situations in teachers' lounges are communicative by their nature. They are social phenomena, structured in the context of time, place, and the involved participants, the teachers. An important term for understanding the social situation of lounges is Weber's (1968) term "social action." The importance of the term lies in the understanding that human actions are deliberate. Actions are not automatic or accidental but express the ability of persons to grasp their environment and act in a reasonable and planned way, based on their interpretations.

The social actions of teachers in their lounges have not been widely explored as yet, though scholars such as Lieberman & Miller (1984) mention the lounge as a site for social and professional interactions with colleagues. Such rooms are part of the social reality of teachers (Hargreaves & Woods 1984). For instance, in the chapter on the meaning of staffroom humor, Woods argues that this is a major way in which teachers

come to terms with their job and reconcile their selves with the demands of the teacher role. (Hargreaves & Woods, 1984, p. 190)

And, in his chapter on staffroom news, Hammersley (1984) looks at certain features of the occupational culture of teaching as revealed in staffroom talk. He views staffroom news as

A kind of collective stocktaking in which teachers compare notes and bring themselves up to date

about the pupils whom they all face in the classroom. (p. 212)

According to Hammersley, teachers' exchanges also serve a rhetorical function:

They seem to be designed to protect the teachers' professional identities in the face of the threat to their sense of their own competence posed by the behaviour of the pupils. (p. 212)

A study conducted by Keinan (1994) showed that in their staffroom, teachers represent their own professional culture to each other. After analyzing teachers' talk in the staffroom, Keinan concluded that the meaning of professionalism in teaching is based on a sense of educational commitment.

The opportunities for interactions with peers provided by teachers' lounges are extremely important for counteracting the sense of being unsupported, and alone. The teachers' lounge is the only unit in the school in which it is possible to examine events from the point of view of teachers being together. The very fact of occupying a place in the teachers' lounge as part of a collective being transforms teachers there into an entity which can be characterized in terms of the lounge community. The community is conceived by its members, and by the students and their parents, as one group. This kind of being "together" can be contrasted with the separate contexts of the cellular structure of classes, to and from which teachers come and go with the ringing of the bell.

The social situation in lounges is shaped by a basic element. In this situation pure privacy does not exist, the teacher is forced to "take a role" and to play a part in the public situation which is a social one by its nature. The blurring of boundaries between the public and private spheres, discussed in chapter 4, is based on an approach which emphasizes the duality in the nature of any social reality.

Accepting the notion that social actions are to be understood as expressing the ability of persons to grasp their environment and to interpret it, we focus on the observable occurrences in lounges, the social facts which may be perceived as the building blocks of social actions.

Social facts help describe the social situation of teachers' lounges, as well as of classrooms. Shapiro & Ben-Eliezer (1991) explain a classroom situation in terms of social facts: i.e., students are sitting; the teacher is standing; the teacher asks questions; students answer; students who wish to speak raise their hands. The classroom is described as a well-defined place where activities planned beforehand are carried out. In the frame of these activities some of the participants are called "students." Their freedom of action is limited by a set of clearly defined rules which permit or prohibit certain behaviors.

Social facts, as Shapiro & Ben-Eliezer (1991) argue, shape the identity of classes which might be described as places in which teacher and students are partners in the same social entity. Classes differ from each other by the specific way their inhabitants behave. According to Shapiro & Ben-Eliezer, some classes are characterized by bad manners in the acting out of social facts, such as speaking without permission or making a lot of noise, while other classes are highly disciplined. Still, the notion of social facts applies to all classes. This concept of "social fact" might be applied as well to teachers' lounges: teachers come in, read the information presented on the notice boards, check their mail boxes, prepare coffee for themselves. Students are not allowed in. The sound of the bell is the sign to stop or to begin any action.

Like classrooms, teachers' lounges might differ in the manner in which their inhabitants express these "social facts," thus creating very different lounge climates. The social situation of lounges is a blend of observable events which can be traced, and in which one can participate. Hidden from the public eye, hard to define events are also part of the life in lounges, and are often the cause for individuals to detach themselves from the group, feeling uncomfortable

and uneasy. The idea of covert events leads us to a discussion of the inner grammar of the teachers' lounges, which encompasses both overt and covert elements.

The Inner Grammar

The social situation of life in teachers' lounges might be conceived of as a text. Like written texts characterized by their syntax, the social text of lounges might be understood in terms of its inner grammar which creates a special syntax. Some features of this inner grammar are overt and directly observable, such as the social facts and actions mentioned above. Other structures of the inner grammar are conventions and norms which are covert, yet implicit in the observable social actions.

The events in teachers' lounges become meaningful, and sometimes even predictable, when the situation is structured, when there is a common basis for the perception and interpretation of these events, or when there are regular patterns of behaviors or roles. Common and routine events in the lounge, such as providing information about a student, or an upcoming lecture, become part of the common basis for interpretation, and their meaning is easily shared among all participants in the social situation.

Sometimes, however, the events in the teachers' lounge are unusual, unique, and the individual interpretation of the situation is not part of the general, accepted basis for interpretation. The social actions in the teachers' lounge develop into routine patterns of behavior, which constitute one part of the inner grammar of teachers' lounges and serve to define collegial norms. Unique situations are conceived as another part of the inner grammar of teachers' lounges, and will be defined as dramatic and "tension" situations. The development and outcomes of such situations are uncertain: they are open-ended and unpredictable. The framework of the "inner grammar" of teachers' lounges allows us to explain what happens when a tense situation is resolved and teachers are able to return to their routines.

We shall turn now to some of the implicit structures of the inner grammar of lounges as expressed in the following norms: a) **norms of collegiality** b) **norms of the “good colleague.”**

Norms of Collegiality

Norms of collegiality were examined carefully by Little (1982, 1990). The term **collegiality** has remained conceptually amorphous and ideologically sanguine as Little claimed,

Advocates have imbued it with a sense of virtue—the expectation that any interaction that breaks the isolation of teachers will contribute in some fashion to the knowledge, skill, judgment or commitment that individuals bring to their work and will enhance the collective capacity of groups or institutions. (1990 p. 509)

An interesting synonym to collegiality is offered by Cunningham & Gresso (1993) who claimed that

An appropriate synonym for collegiality is community. When people have a sense of community, they belong, and have pride in the group . . . Some of the characteristics of a collegial group are honesty, trust, loyalty, commitment, caring . . . Collegiality is characterized by the amount of open and honest interaction within the group and a clear and quick understanding of what group members are saying . . . Collegiality exists when each member feels free and encouraged to participate, and when members feel that they share equally in influencing the group. (pp. 99–100)

The ability of members of a community to understand each other clearly and quickly is linked to a set of shared norms which develop over time as exemplified in the following vignette in which Shapiro & Ben-Eliezer (1991) suggest

that we imagine a group of friends who decide to gather every Friday afternoon in the municipal park to play football. After a few meetings, which go very well, one of the group decides to surprise his friends and brings soft drinks. The friends like this idea very much, and the boy who prior to this was quiet and not outstanding in any way becomes prominent and, for the first time, is even nominated to be the organizer of the team. The boy continues to bring soft drinks every Friday until once he is forced to stay longer at work and is unable to bring the expected drinks with him. In spite of his delay he comes finally to the park. To his surprise, his friends are hostile toward him, and a few of them even call him names. This story serves as a starting point to our discussion because it illustrates very clearly the paradigm of a "norm": What is expected? From whom? What is acceptable? What is not acceptable? What are the possible results of our actions?

The norms of teachers' lounges are created during the daily interaction between teachers. Norms which concern ways of speaking, of dressing, and ways to conduct routine activities, might be perceived as "collegial norms." People who have a group relationship tend to reach an agreement in areas relevant to the interactions in this group. Norms can be implicit, and hard to identify. The more explicit the norms, the easier it is for new members to enter a group and adapt to its ways. The view of norms as unwritten rules and as expectations to behave in a certain manner, provides an explanatory framework for some of the dilemmas, dramas, and tensions which can arise in lounges, and which are presented in the following sections.

Life of teachers in school might cause behaviors which contradict acceptable norms. For example, according to the normative perception acceptable in teachers' lounges, students are not allowed to enter this area. When students do enter the lounge because a teacher has invited them, it constitutes a breaking of norms. Thus a dilemma situation is created. On the one hand, a teacher has clearly acted in a manner which caused an unusual, unexpected tension situation to arise, in contradiction to the expected "collegial norms" of the inner grammar of the lounge. On the other

hand, another important school norm concerns the role of teachers as helping their students. Dilemmas in the lounge can be caused by contrary expectations for behavior. For instance, in the lounge teachers might all talk at the same time, while in their classes a strict order of speaking might be adhered to. Some teachers might find this situation highly stressful, reacting verbally and trying to stop the racket.

Since life in teachers' lounges reflects the culture of collegial norms, it is important for inhabitants of this culture to understand the nature of these norms. Two events exemplify the role norms of collegiality play in the social situation of teachers' lounges.

Giving up a Free Day

In one teachers' lounge in a senior highschool, a group of six English teachers who were very close friends, used to eat breakfast together every Tuesday. That was their way of showing cohesiveness as a professional group. It became a ritual which involved bringing coffee and cake, telling jokes, and creating their own unique atmosphere. One morning, the principal told one of the teachers that her schedule had been changed, and that in the future Tuesday would be her day off. The teacher told the principal that it was impossible for her to change days because Tuesday was the day she met with her group of English teachers to discuss work in an informal meeting. She wanted to continue to participate in these meetings, and was willing to give up her day off for the sake of not withdrawing from the group in which she was a member. Her interpretation of norms of collegiality meant spending a morning together with her colleagues every Tuesday.

Breaking the Norm

Collegial norms might be considered by some members of the group to be most unpleasant even though the term itself has a positive connotation. Norms are behaviors which

are implicitly accepted by a group of people, and any deviation from these norms might be understood as a critique and an attempt to change the norm. Eating in the teachers' lounge is one of the more obvious norms that exist. Teachers' routines, that is, their choice of companions, the way they prepare their coffee, all reflect these norms. Tammy, for example, had many negative experiences to impart about the teachers' lounge. She disliked the noise there, as well as the messiness. She told us that she had tried to bring pots of flowers to decorate the room but no one had paid any attention. She became upset because other teachers left their dirty glasses, bread crumbs, and dirty ashtrays on the table. Above all she was upset with the fact that she could not change these norms of behavior. She stopped entering the teachers' lounge, except to get her mail or read the announcements. However, since she broke the norm of being part of the group she sensed that she could not stay there. At the end of the year she moved to another school.

Misunderstandings, conflicts, and unpleasantness in the lounge can be explained on the basis of cultural and individual differences concerning the norms of using time and space (Hall 1959). A new teacher, for example, might enter the lounge and sit on a "free" chair without knowing that this space was usually occupied by one of the senior teachers. The new teacher might feel uneasy, without understanding the "hostility" around him or her.

Another common situation, concerning the norms of time use in the lounge, arises when the bell rings after a break. The ringing is a sign to return to classrooms, but some teachers might tend to delay their exit from the lounge. Teachers who leave the lounge with the first sound of the bell break a collegial norm, and might become the object of jokes, or even hostile remarks.

Collegial norms of accepted behavior in the lounge are usually shared by staff and students alike. Thus, students know whether the lounge is out-of-bounds or not, when and under what circumstances they are allowed to enter it. Any unusual behavior tends to create a tense atmosphere. The following is an example of such a situation: