TEACHER DECISION-MAKING IN THE CLASSROOM
A collection of papers edited by John Eggleston
Teacher Decision-Making
Making decisions is one of a teacher's work. Considered unimportant, these decisions can severely impact the lives of all who work in schools and the teachers themselves. This collection of papers is a testament to the understanding of classroom consequences, to identify a body of knowledge, and to indicate the power of the teacher in the school.

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Chapter 8

Control in the comprehensive system

Colin Hunter

To understand the process of decision-making—whether at individual, group, organisational or societal levels—there are at least two essential questions which need to be considered:

Who influences the outcomes?

How is the outcome legitimised and accepted by others involved in the situation?

There are contained within these questions assumptions which are connected with the two major concepts of Power and Ideology which coexist in an intimate relationship. These concepts need to be explored so that elements of the decision-making process and the question of control in schools can be highlighted. In this paper some examples are drawn from a case study conducted by the author in a large comprehensive school.

Weber (1947) describes power as 'The probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'.

It could be inferred that, within this outline definition, there must be a conflict of interests or values between two or more persons or groups; that one person or group actually bows to others' wishes; and that one party must be able to invoke sanctions against the other for non-compliance, thereby making the cost of compliance less than the cost of experiencing these sanctions. That is, the act of complying, no matter how reluctantly, is usually based on a rational decision.

Dahl (1958) has suggested that the overt decision-making processes are in fact synonymous with power processes and that concrete decisions by individuals, organisations, communities or society can be examined and researched to locate and explain who has power. Elsewhere, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) argue that there is another dimension of power which is not adequately covered in this approach. They identify an aspect of power which is exercised by a person or group who confine the scope and area of decision-making to relatively 'safe' issues which do not threaten their superior position.

In describing these two faces of power (p. 947), they state:

In each, A participates in decisions and thereby adversely affects B. But there are important differences between the two: in the one case A openly participates; in the other, he participates only in the sense that he works to sustain those values and rules of procedure that help him keep certain issues out of the public domain.

What Bachrach and Baratz do not account for in their article is that the most effective use of the second type of power is based not on the active participation of the powerful 'manipulating the agenda', but on the passive acceptance of the premises of decisions by those who are being dominated or influenced by others—that is, the accepted parameters within which change can take place are sedimented and taken for granted by the participants, and this acts in favour of those who hold power because it excludes a wide range of alternatives which could challenge or question the status quo.¹

This acceptance of unconscious or unquestioning assumptions of people at routine or habitual levels in the ordering of everyday affairs makes the third face of power anonymous and discreet, but it is nevertheless effective and pervasive in its influence—usually in substantiating and upholding those already with dominant positions. These parameters, taken for granted because of their institutionalised characteristics, are often structural in nature and have a constraining effect on individuals in their milieu. It is this third aspect of power which facilitates the bridging of the so-called dichotomy of the problems of order and control and which underlines Marx's point that men make their own world, but not in conditions of their own choosing. Meaning and identity through interaction take place within limits which are structural in nature.

It is this point which Sharp and Green (1975) emphasised in their research in a 'progressive' primary school. Their approach was described by Apple (1977) as,

A critical social interpretation that looks at the negotiation of identities and meanings in specific institutions like schools as taking place within a context that often determines the parameters of what is negotiable or meaningful. This context does not merely reside at the level of consciousness; it is the nexus of economic and political institutions, a nexus which defines what schools should be about, that determines these parameters.

It is necessary, therefore, for schools to be viewed in their social
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context, within structural constraints, as well as to be viewed as examples of organisations which are maintained by individual interactions and perceptions. A school has certain aims which are the outcome of decisions made outside and imposed upon it and of autonomous decisions made within the school—both aspects are significant and require consideration.

There appears, however, to be a lack of literature in the sociology of the school which uses this approach. Organisational studies of schools have concentrated on such aspects as selection or streaming or the effect of the personality of the Head on the running of the school. Often excluded are the intra-school structural aspects such as the communication system, effects of school size, the formal distribution of authority, formal and informal sanctions, and teacher participation and extra-school structural matters such as comprehensive, the growing insistence on teacher accountability, and other socio-political demands overtly and covertly placed on the school system. Basically, the question of control as it affects schools has been largely ignored (until relatively recently).

Increasingly, however, the question of control in comprehensive schooling has become more central largely due to two developments:  
1. An attempt by outside school political and economic pressures to increase the accountability of teachers. 
2. An attempt by teachers to increase their participation in the running of schools.

Both of these developments concern a potential redistribution of power and involve a conflict of ideologies. Ideologies here are regarded as having the following characteristics: they are based on beliefs and values which may, or may not, have rational support; they simplify highly complex social and situational processes in terms of what ought to be; and they do so to sanction a particular course of action.

Education is an area fertile to the growth and development of ideologies. Many of the issues involve value disputes with relevant ‘objective’ theoretical knowledge being in short supply, particularly concerning the feasibility of goals and outcomes of decisions. Positions are therefore taken which are basically ideological in that they seek to persuade rather than rationally to explore and evaluate.  

So, for example, Anthony Crosland could claim:  
Our belief in comprehensive education was a product of fundamental value judgments about equity and social division. Research cannot tell you whether you should go comprehensive or not—that’s a basic value judgment. (Kogan, 1971, p. 190)

There has been clear evidence of a change in emphasis of ideologies in the contemporary political scene, where decisions concerning education are made at some distance from the school processes they affect. It is argued that education in the mid-seventies is in a crisis which is partly economic, partly administrative, political and ideological in nature, and a consequence of the failure of previous educational policies.

In the early 1960s there had been a significant conjunction of the aspirations of politicians, the findings of social researchers, the theories of educationalists and adequate concomitant economic means. It was felt that qualitative changes could be made towards the making of a more egalitarian society and a more efficient technological economy, through quantitative growth in educational resources. There were therefore high expectations for the returns on the increasing investment in school facilities, training of teachers, comprehensive education, raising of the school leaving age, curricular innovation (teacher directed), compensatory and expansion of higher and further education.

As Finn et al. (1977, p. 81) suggest, this was a period when education was regarded as a ‘good’ thing, ‘that the teachers could do the “job” with the right materials, [and] that intelligence was amenable to policy initiatives’.

The evidence emerging in the 1970s was that the qualitative change had not in fact occurred and that institutional arrangements, universal access to education, and compensatory programmes in themselves were not sufficient in attaining social justice and good economic returns.

The more pessimistic approach of social commentators such as Jencks gives credence to the more severe political attitude towards education which now exists. He argues that schools and schooling are not significant variables in societal change.

Our research suggests that the character of a school’s output depends largely on a single input, namely the characteristics of the entering children. Everything else—the school budget, its policies, the characteristics of the teachers—is either secondary or completely irrelevant. (1975, p. 255)

Others, such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Willis (1977), regard the educational system as an integral element in the reproduction of the prevailing class structure of society.

Schools foster legitimate inequality through the ostensible meritocratic manner by which they reward and promote students, and allocate them to distinct positions in the occupational hierarchy. (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 11)

The neo-hereditarian arguments of Jensen, Eysenck and Herstein—in which they re-assert the importance of genetic factors in educational performance—are indicative of the changing climate in educational theory, as is the re-emergence to prominence of the ‘Black Paper’
activists. The 'new' sociologists of education are not optimistically prescriptive in policy terms as sociologists were in the 1960s (such as Halley, Douglas, Vaizey), but emphasise the relativism of knowledge and question the legitimacy of assumptions (see, for example, Young, 1971).

The political contribution to the increasing breakdown of the 1960s educational consensus is being undertaken on two fronts, the economic cuts and the call for accountability of those involved in schooling. Both were highlighted in the 'Great Debate', and both developments crucially affect the running of individual schools.

Heads and teachers are still coping with the consequences of the high expectations placed on them in the last decade with institutional, curricular, examination and selection reforms. They are doing so, however, with resources which are defined by current, and very different, ideological political decisions, in a changed economic climate. This has created a number of practical difficulties in the running of schools so that short-term strategies for coping become increasingly necessary.

At the same time, the aims of the school are being eroded as schools of the 1970s concern more in closer scrutiny from non-teachers than of which the Bullock Report, Callaghan's Ruskin Speech, DES Yellow Book, Auld Report and recent HMI National Reports are examples.

The consequences of this in some respects cause uncertainty, low morale, and not a little frustration in heads and teachers and add to the pressures experienced in working in schools. These points were highlighted in a case study undertaken in a large comprehensive school (1,200 pupils) in a Yorkshire town. It was formed by the merging of a secondary modern school and grammar school in 1969 on an enlarged campus at the latter school. The focus of attention was upon the staff rather than the students, and the research methods included participant observation (for 16 months) and unstructured and structured interviews. The school, while in some respects unique, shared many of the problems and issues of other comprehensive schools at this time.

The head highlighted what he thought many of these problems were in a Speech Day address:

Society expects too much! Think what it has done to education in the last decade or two. Expanded it enormously; diluted its staff; expected it to keep up the same basics whilst catering for a mass of new or expanded syllabuses... . . .

Oh, for a more consistent political leadership! Oh, for a Left which did not rush its comprehensive fences with such doctrinaire enthusiasm, and which gave to its new schools resources needed if an improvement in standards is to accompany a simultaneous advance towards social equality. Oh, for a Right which wittered less about standards, for its dislike of Comprehensives, and which truly accepted the pattern of education which for good or ill is now the dominant one in Britain. Oh for a Centre which didn't tend to disintegrate into a bumbling of busy-bodies bickering for parent power, pupil power, rights of the child, abolition of the cane, and so on.

The leaders of the majority party become day to day administrators instead of policy makers—bureaucrats in fact; or Lord High Executurers axing one employee here, retiring one there, transferring one somewhere else. We are now living on overwork and charity... . . .

This school, typical of many, has had to undergo successive concussions of amalgamating two separate schools into one; turning comprehensive, enduring the noisy construction of these buildings round its academic calm, facing local government reorganisation, and absorbing examination reforms which occur in almost every year that passes. And now the economic cuts!

This is an interesting passage from an embattled head publicly defending the school and attacking the sources of constraint with an ideological rhetoric that, in presenting a prescriptive, simplified picture of the complex workings of the school, seeks to persuade rather than describe.

'We aim', he says, 'to turn our pupils into critical adults who will be responsible citizens and flexible workers in a fast changing world', in the school which he describes as, 'a tranquil oasis of civilised and noble virtue'.

There is much evidence to suggest that this latter description is not a representative picture of the normal day to day experience of the great majority of pupils and teachers in the school. It is, though, acceptable fare for the relevant audience of Speech Day, including local education officials, governors and parents. It is also an example of an ideology which seeks to present a corporate sense of unity of purpose rather than to reflect actuality. It identifies the enemy, praises the 'war-effort', and concludes that despite the problems the battle is going well to the credit of 'the school' and its occupants.

'I can assure you that [the school] has nothing at all to fear from the "Great Debate"—evidence includes examination results above the national average and links with local industry.

'You can guess who do the overwork' (the teachers), 'the charity is that of the parents and well-wishers... . . . Thank God, for an excellent community here to rely on, our pupils themselves' or '95 per cent of them anyway, who are a grand lot'.

As a public relations exercise, the speech constitutes an erudite and persuasive performance. It does, however, highlight an element in the difficulties encountered in the organisation of schools. The head
Control in the comprehensive system experiences the external political and economical constraints in a different way from the teachers: The head relates the outside influences to internal administration at a general, overall level; the teachers experience them at a personal, individual level. The head thinks in terms of general rules and uniform events; teachers think in terms of concrete situations, unique individuals and extenuating circumstances. The head uses universalistic criteria as a basis for decision-making; the teachers' situation often calls for consideration of particulars.

So, to take a common place example, one can understand the mild resentment of a practical subject teacher whose class was waiting at the door to leave two minutes before the final afternoon bell after putting away a great deal of equipment and material. The head, pointedly looked at his watch, and commented on the 'early' finish. His view was influenced by the general rule that as much teaching time as possible should be utilised. The teacher's view was dominated by the specific situational variables such as the relationship with the pupils involved, the activity undertaken by them and the time of day.

This point of diverse perspectives is crucial in understanding the internal decision-making process in a school, and particularly the nature and extent of the participation that teachers have been demanding in the running of schools in the last few years. In the participative procedures the two, often conflicting, perspectives are brought together, but organisational problems and issues are usually considered by heads (and senior staff) at the universalistic level, while the interests of the staff are often focused on the particularistic level. It is suggested here that the head is able to control the extent and effectiveness of teacher participation and to legitimise his control through the mechanisms of power described above—the use of sanctions, communication system, ideology of consensus, manipulation of the agenda, and the existence of taken-for-granted parameters—but in a way more acceptable to the democratic and power sharing values prevalent today.

The head in the case study, for example, justifies the taking of decisions himself (though strongly advocating 'participation' by all teachers) argument that only he sees the whole picture from his special vantage point, which is not influenced by sectional interests. The explanation for accepting some remedies of a staff working party, rejecting others, and introducing quite separate remedies in some cases, was made by the head to a full staff meeting in these terms:

I liken my part to that of the Prime Minister. I hope that doesn't seem too grand. They [the working party] report back to me, and I have got to make changes in the light of the whole. This has to be done in that they don't necessarily see the whole field. Then I, and my senior staff who advise me, look at the recommendations. With the best will in the world we are unable to take up some of the points.

Given this, the machinery for participation is complex and all-embracing. There are eight types of meetings (other than the staff meeting) with an opportunity for every member of staff to attend and give his views. There is much evidence to suggest that the different perspectives held by head and staff and the power distribution make such an exercise largely irrelevant to many staff.

For example, after a staff meeting an elderly assistant teacher remarked on a discussion regarding the use of classrooms as teacher bases:

'It was a waste of time last night. The head stopped it [i.e. he ruled the discussion out of order] and what happened after was a waste of time. We didn't get our say. The important point didn't come up about having to carry all your material to classes. I cricked my back when I slipped on the stairs with an armful of the stuff. What happens is we don't carry the materials, and the kids don't get any geometry.'

At the same meeting, concerning another topic, a head of department commented,

'It's like banging your head against a brick wall. They never take any notice.'

At another meeting, a junior member of staff thought that there was, 'a lot of frustration there under the surface, but it didn't come out. S was getting at the system you know.'

The point that the challenge to the system had to be inferred and was not explicit reflects a prevailing characteristic in that the staff were often markedly reticent about expressing in open meeting the opinions they talked about in the semi-privacy of small groups in the staff room, and particularly if the head was present. Apathy, timidity and caution were some of the reasons presented, the latter reason some claimed through experience.

'It does you more harm than good to speak your mind.'

'The hierarchy take it out of you.'

Such comments often accompanied staff room anecdotes about the use of direct sanctions by the head and the 'dominant coalition' of deputy heads—and sometimes the head of schools. Admittedly, the head did possess overt sanctions such as control of resources, access to promotion, job references and even direct admonition. It was difficult empirically to substantiate use of such sanctions, and if used, they were used sparingly and discreetly. More to the point, many of the staff believed they would be used—but even more importantly, the need for such sanctions was minimised by the selective use of the sanction of appointment.
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As the deputy headmistress explained:

'We do an awful lot in considering the appointments of staff. We want people who fit in with this type of arrangement. There are one or two who don't toe the line. They are sparks in a sense, and this is necessary.

I could see a situation where a large number of people like this might bring havoc in my opinion. Those who would demand that the school be democratic, with votes, and so on. This would cause disruption. . . . On the whole, in general, the system is accepted.'

This acceptance cannot be understood purely in terms of the overt dimension of power. The control of the flow of information in the school is an example of the second face of power (see Bachrach and Baratz, 1962).

In analysing the number of contributions to staff meetings, it was quite clear that it was the head and two deputies who controlled the proceedings, in that the ratio of their contributions was 13 to 4 (from two heads of department): to 1 (from forty-two other members of staff). If the volume of contributions were to be added, the disparity in the ratio would be much greater.

Even this crude indicator shows the extent to which staff meetings were used to disseminate information downwards from the head to the staff rather than being used as an open consultative process. This direction of information flow was supplemented by memos, notices and information sheets (over 200 of which were collected by the writer in one academic year).

The flow of information upwards to the head was efficient and often filtered via the most senior staff, the head being relatively isolated from individual members of staff because of the other demands of his job. The deputy headmistress saw the function of keeping the head informed as being of great importance:

'If there are any moans or grumbles, I usually try and find out some more in the staff room. . . . It goes through the senior staff to the head. . . . All senior staff are aware of the duty of being in the common room to hear first-hand comments. One of the first bits of advice that was given to me by the old headmaster was that it was an important part of the job to be there in the staff-room.'

The horizontal flow of information within the school among the staff, on the other hand, was haphazard, unorganised, discreet and unofficial, depending largely on friendship and departmental groups. The situations in which a horizontal flow of information could be used for corporate decisions to be made are defused in that the head gives the meetings no executive powers and the agendas are not specific enough to encourage expectations of decisions being made.

For example, the head made these introductory remarks in opening discussion at a 'senior staff meeting' which was considering the curriculum organisation of the school's first year:

'I call this gathering of regional heads the cabinet. You do not meet as frequently as the most senior staff of deputys and sometimes the head of schools—they are the inner cabinet. This is an informal get-together to swap ideas with me listening in, and you listening to one another. . . . Let's give it three quarters of an hour, shall we?'

This type of arrangement maximises the flow of information, but minimises the pressure for instant decisions resulting from these exercises in 'participation'. This procedure tends to generate a sense of frustration in many of the staff involved in that no indication is given as to which of the views, if any, are noteworthy or significant. The head is able to keep his options open, but on the other hand expects others to express information or opinion instantly. As a senior staff member commented:

'He expects immediate answers and evaluations from you when he asks for them, and if you don't give them there and then your chance may have been lost.'

The constraints which affected the working parties—crucial instruments in demonstrating the reality of 'participation'—were of a different kind, but did lessen the parties' effectiveness as tools for fundamental re-appraisals of policy.

Terms of reference given by the head to the 12-16 curriculum working party were:

'to look into the modifications necessary to our curriculum, in the 12-16 range, in the light of the changing demands placed upon us by a rapidly evolving international society; to consider the relevance of existing subjects, and the need to introduce new subjects or combine subjects.

This appears as a wide and open brief, but there were many hidden constraints which effectively narrowed the decision-making potential so that a broad endorsement of the status quo was a logical outcome. These constraints included the fact that the chairman of the working party was the deputy headmistress, who laboriously constructed the complicated timetable throughout the summer term—a responsible chore anxiously undertaken. Any new ideas regarding curriculum innovation or changes in the organisation of subjects and classes came under her critical scrutiny with respect to their feasibility in terms of time-sabling. She is confident of the support of the head in upholding her definition of timetabling problems:'

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We try and compromise if possible, and try to meet them [other staff], as far as possible. If I get to the situation where I cannot do what they want— it would depend on my trouble with the timetable—I would stick out, and the head would probably back me.

Her defined needs of timetabling therefore dominated much of the discussion of the working party. A second constraint was the composition of the committee chosen by the head. There was a predominance of senior staff (four heads of department; a head of school; deputy headmistress) with three assistant teachers. Another weighting was that there were five of the senior staff who were former grammar school staff, and even after a number of years of comprehensive schooling this fact tended to be of significance. Group discussions which have the aim of achieving consensus can easily become oppressive to divergent opinions, and this was the experience of one of the juniors, a former secondary modern school teacher who tried to introduce points which would have involved fundamentally re-appraising the school’s curriculum.

A third constraint on the working party was the time available. After two preliminary meetings towards the end of the autumn term, written evidence was sifted from heads of departments. The committee were then given the two months of January and February to discuss and report so that recommendations could be available for the head to announce decisions regarding the next year’s timetable at the March staff meeting. For the terms of reference to be considered seriously, there needed to be a much longer period for discussion on what ostensibly was a radical appraisal of curriculum needs.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the recommendations were not contentious and indeed, in parts, they were complacent. They were, however, administratively more convenient as far as timetabling was concerned, involving slight shifts of procedure and emphases and limiting students’ choice of subjects. The one curriculum innovation was a section involving two periods per week for two thirds of students in the fourth and fifth years. The complete recommendations and conclusions of the working party were:

(a) The range of subjects offered at all levels is good, and the curriculum relevant to this present age.
(b) With the possible exception of one of the second foreign languages, there is no desire to eject or to introduce any subjects, nor is there a desire to combine subjects (the reverse is the case of Social Studies). Traditional subjects are changing within themselves both in content and approach, to meet the changing needs of today.
(c) The second and third form curriculum should be more uniform if a banded system is to operate, and the second language not introduced until the third year, and then as an option.

(d) Whatever system is used in Main School, the present range of subjects should stay, though a reduction in choice would be preferred.
(e) In the C groups, Social Studies should become History and Geography, and there should be some changes in Leisure Activities.
(f) A two-year general course is proposed for all Main School G and GC groups—at least two periods per week.

This result vindicates Perrow’s (1972, p. 292) analysis of the results of increased sharing in organisational decision-making:

The prospects for participative management are dim; they are reduced to minor innovations within a complex network of established premises for action. The organisation is not static, by any means, but change is incremental, partial, hit or miss, and channelled in the well-worn grooves of established adaptions.

The extensive consultation in the school concerned, it could be argued, is almost a process which has as an end in itself to simulate a democratic decision-making process, to foster the involvement and commitment of the participants, and to legitimate the resultant decisions. It also acts as a channel to keep the head informed, thereby facilitating his control and substantiating his claim that he is the only one in a position to have an overview of the whole scene.

These indirect forms of control used by the head are more compatible with democratic values of human freedom and individual integrity than the more overtly autocratic behaviour traditionally associated with school heads in the past. They are, at the same time, more effective means of control in that they reduce resistance through calls to collective responsibility—the price required for involvement in participation.

The head made just this point in a letter to the local newspaper defending his decision not to publish pupils’ exam results:

School policy is not the mere whim of a headmaster, but rather the product of a continuing dialogue between governors, staff, local authority, the DES (and other national institutions), parents, pupils, and so on. There are always dissenters, even in the governing body, but once policy has emerged and been tested, it becomes rather like cabinet responsibility. That is to say, it is supported by all those in authority—supported critically if you like, but supported loyally until new circumstances demand new policies.

Woodward (in Musgrove, 1971, p. 79) says of another situation that elaborate systems of internal communication and of representation have not given workers power, ‘rather do they constitute a means of reinforcing the power of management over the managed.’

Crozier (in Musgrove, 1971, p. 86) agrees and adds, ‘If one accepts
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participation, one is bound to co-operate, i.e. to bear one's co-participants' pressure whether they are one's equals or superiors.

In the school studied, despite the existence of democratic organisational procedures, it was evident that the policy formulation was largely conducted by the head, with a small number of senior staff having some influence. The underlying reason why teacher participation had so nebulous an effect was that its definition, accepted by all concerned, was that of consultation rather than a sharing in the making of decisions. This is one of the taken-for-granted assumptions that constitute the parameters of the third 'face' of power mentioned above—the existence of which reinforces the control, in this situation, of the head.

The existence of these parameters becomes apparent only when they are breached or challenged and the power that usually lies dormant is activated to maintain the status quo. There is a limit to the effectiveness of this procedure in that overt use of power exposes its limitations. It is therefore in the interests of the powerful that the parameters remain hidden by remaining at an accepted, routinised level. The head was acknowledging this fact when he emphasised his reliance on consensus. In interviews he commented: 'Politics is the art of the possible—it's the same with headmastering' and 'I have one simple rule—one can only rule with consent'.

This attitude was mirrored in a remark to a member of staff concerning the problems of another head, 'I would never get myself into a position in which my orders were unenforceable'.

There was, however, one occasion when the taken-for-granted parameters in the school were breached, and the usually latent power resources were activated. The incident involved the majority of staff, unilaterally deciding at a hastily convened common room meeting (with senior staff and head absent) that they would not teach two pupils who had vandalised a staff member's car during the previous week-end. This constituted a reversal of the usual relationship in that the staff were dictating to the head on matters of school policy.

The next day the staff were summoned to a staff meeting in which the head spoke forty-five minutes justifying his actions (or lack of them) after the damaged car was discovered. While acting consistently with regard to his doctrine of the art of the possible, he reluctantly conceded that he agreed that the pupils should be expelled; but in doing so he made it plain that such future action by staff would not be tolerated. The meeting ended thus:

Head. 'I think I can say (pause); I think I can say that I am behind the staff regarding expulsion. However, you went about it in the wrong way.'

Staff Member. 'How else could we have done it?'

The significant outcome of this meeting was that the head's stand was not challenged by the staff. It was evident that his reaction restored the taken-for-granted parameters as to the distribution of power and the relative juxtaposition of teachers' professional autonomy and other bureaucratic requirements. The staff as a whole may have maturedly found an equilibrium maintaining 'a balance between the conditions conducive to creativity, and those conducive to control' (see Purvis, 1973, p. 44).

More pessimistically, it could be argued that the school organisation is in fact an oligarchy which masks its real identity in democratic procedures and rhetoric. Teachers join the ranks of other institutional professionals who, Salaman suggests, on the whole conform to their organisationally determined tasks, objectives, and procedures; they are free to act autonomously as long as their decisions are appropriate and conform to the organisation's notions of rationality. Porrer (1972) is even more biting in his remarks:

The professional—the prima donna of organisation theory, is really the ultimate enunciator—capable of doing everything well in that harem except that which he should not do, and in this case that is to mess around with the goals of an organisation, or the assumptions that determine to what ends he will use his professional skills.

The head, however, is not invested with the concomitant power that would befit a dominant position as an accepted 'democratic dictator' in schools. Rather, it seems as if he is continually trying to create room for manoeuvre within severely delineated limits imposed from outside the school. The process of policy-making, over which he presides, appears to be reduced to minor adaptations within a complex framework of taken-for-granted assumptions or premises for action.

This framework is altered not by participants within the school, but by forces (often political and economical) which have their locus outside of the school. The effects of rapid externally imposed change are often reflected in the lack of informal consensus within schools—hence, the need for official rhetoric to create a sense of unity of purpose, which may not reflect the actual situation. For teachers, this rhetoric is often of little help or relevance in their particular school experience in that it is often based on general rules and explanations, giving mechanistic answers to organisic problems.
Control in the comprehensive system

Thus, we have teachers who are isolated from the policy-making process of a school and who concentrate on coping strategies to deal with day to day contingencies, while the head, in a restricted milieu, attempts to come to terms with outside factors over which he has little control—the school being bounded by legislative, administrative, political, ideological and economic structural constraints.

But these structural constraints are not co-ordinated in their influence. They are often in opposition so that the school is often confronted by contradictory pressures. The present role of the Education Secretary illustrates this dilemma. The Minister, at her political level, tries to balance the potentially conflicting forces of imposed economic restraint with the pressure, mostly from her political opponents and industrialists, for increased ‘standards’ in schools.

This balancing act has affected schools in that resources and manpower are becoming increasingly limited and teacher competency is questioned in terms of greater public accountability and possible contraction of teacher autonomy. At the same time, the schools and teachers are asked to do more in the ‘national interest’, which is defined almost completely in economic terms.

This gives some indication of the societal process which Raymond Williams has described: ‘materialism and idealism play a see-saw game in our culture; each thriving on the weakness of the other’. After the idealist 1960s and early 1970s we are lurching into the more materialistic mid and late 1970s; and schools and teachers are experiencing this shift at structural, organisational and individual levels.

It is conceivable that future developments in schooling could be characterised by the results of the alternate domination of opposing emphases. Such a drift would involve policy being based not on the strength of arguments but on the strength of commitments, not on quality of arguments but on the quantity of support.

Alternatively, control may evolve into the hands of a commanding narrow elite. Or there may be a move towards democratisation in terms such that those vitally affected by any decision may have an effective voice in that decision, so that decisions relate in a meaningful way to those who experience the consequences.

One of the main variables influencing future development will be the extent of the understanding that people (in this case teachers, heads, administrators etc.) have of their situation and their place in the societal perspective.

C. Wright Mills (1970) describes this in terms of the coming together of private troubles and public issues. This involves the individual and his milieu being located within the social structures they form. As he puts it:

When we understand social structures and structural changes as

Notes

1. C. Wright Mills (1970) makes this point at a societal level: ‘Much power today is successfully employed without the sanction of the reason or the conscience of the obedient. Justification of rules no longer seem so necessary to exercise their power. At least for many of the greatest decisions of our time... mass persuasion has not been “necessary”, the fact is simply accomplished... the frequent absence of engaging legitimation, and the prevalence of mass apathy are surely two of the central political facts about Western society today’ (p. 50).

2. More teacher participation has been sought not only by the more radical groups such as Rank and File. The following NUT Executive Resolution of 1973 was strongly endorsed by the Conference: ‘The Union shall commit itself fully to the immediate objective of establishing mandatory consultations in all schools. After this has been achieved, and its effects assessed, there should be consideration of the desirability of legal and other changes aimed at the further devolution of responsibility within schools’.

3. For further discussion on this topic see Naish, Hartnett and Finlayson (1976).

4. As Warwick (1974, p. 73) has commented, ‘It is in the interest of management to ensure as much predictability as it can in its own workforce, by hierarchical structuring, spreading organisational ideologies and manipulating the flow of information, or regulating access to it.’

5. An example of this aspect at societal level is given in the recent William Tyndale school case (see Gretton and Jackson, 1976).


7. This approach is being attempted in a school situation at Countesthorpe College, Leicestershire (see Watts, 1977).