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# ORDER AND CONTROL IN JUNIOR SCHOOLS· AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Forty five teachers in three English junior schools were interviewed about aspects of their classroom work including their perspectives on and practices of control It is argued that the typically isolated nature of the teacher s classroom performance necessitates the centrality of order since in the absence of other means it is used as a signal to significant others and by them as an indication of general professional competence Teachers themselves however legitimate their stress on control in terms of perspectives summarized in this paper as domino theory and decline and fall In essence teachers argue that due to the inherent nature of children and because of the condition of family life the educational system and society in general order is under perpetual and ever increasing threat Thus constant vigilance and the avoidance of certain classroom practices (such as those that teachers characterize as informal') are essential to the task of averting chaos

The maintenance of classroom order seems to be central to popular constructions of what is to be a teacher, the notion of a man or woman struggling more or less successfully to achieve control is intricately bound up with folklore and folk memories of school Expectations that teaching is crucially about control also appear to be an essential element in the views of writers about teaching Long ago, Waller described the teacher pupil relationship as one of 'institutionalized dominance and subordination' (21, p 195), and more recently Lacey argued that

> the teacher erects a system of rules and informal understandings that provides him with a manageable system for sustaining order The system of control is the minimum but essential element in the repertoire of the teacher who is 'getting by' but it remains an essential element in the repertoire of the successful teacher (12, p 171)

He goes on to suggest that this occurs because of the difficulty of viewing disordered and chaotic classrooms as effective learning environments Similarly, for Marland, 'everything depends on good order' (15, p 3)

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Recent research has also suggested that for teachers in very different types of school, order is of central concern. For example, it has been argued that for teachers in infants' schools, 'playtime was an awful warning of what might happen if they did not exercise control in the classroom' (10, p. 23). Similarly, Woods, in a study of a secondary modern school, suggested that 'the authoritarian teacher enjoys high esteem because of his ability to perform the custodial function while others struggle in varying degrees' (24, p. 115). Jenks viewed teachers in a junior school as coping with their situation by maintaining a 'central notion of control, usually exercised as silence: this is what is sought often, and against this, success in the classroom is measured' (9, p. 28).

While a number of writers have analysed teachers' control strategies in a variety of contexts (e.g., 1, 2, 5, 20, 22, 25), the origins of strategies and their legitimation by teachers have been less frequently considered. What, in other words, are the sources and implications of teachers' perspectives stressing the centrality of questions of control in their daily work?

Typically, the teacher works alone with few opportunities to make informed judgements of colleagues' teaching. Ginsberg, for example, suggests that a powerful teacher norm is that classrooms should not be 'violated' by outsiders' intrusions (6), and Dreeben argues that:

> Because they occupy isolated classrooms, teachers work separately from each other for most of the day; and since there is a prevailing taboo that teachers abstain from observing each other at work, they learn very little *at first hand* about what their colleagues are doing and how well they are doing it (4, p. 52).

That this isolation has implications for order and control is suggested by Dale:

> Most teachers work in isolation from other adults, confronted by a much larger number of pupils, whom as a group they are *physically* unable to restrain or even detain. This isolation leads in the first place to an emphasis on survival. Clearly, survival is an essential prerequisite of continuing in any situation, and ordinarily it can be taken for granted. That many teachers do not 'survive' is well known, and I do not wish to suggest that their isolation is the only reason for this, merely that it is a major contributory cause (3, p. 52).

Simply to 'survive' then, the teacher must be centrally concerned with order; this, under current pupil-teacher ratios cannot be assumed but must be achieved by the teacher, imposed on pupils. Thus,

> The teacher pupil ratio ensures that discipline, the exercise of authority, is not left to the discretion of teachers, but is a central part of their job (3, p 49)

Both isolation and the teacher pupil ratio ensure that teachers must be concerned with 'achieveing' order

The implications of isolation and the consequent centrality of control to teachers' perspectives and practices are far reaching McPherson suggests that the teachers in her study not only believed that without order learning would not occur, an assumption that was never questioned or even discussed, but further,

> having assumed that disorder prevented learning, the teacher went on to assume, that by producing order, she had brought about learning (14, p 34)

Wilson argued that one powerful source of 'role strain' for teachers is the diffuseness of the teacher's tasks, the absence of clear boundaries whereby he or she can know and measure his or her achievement Success and failure in terms of adequate socialization is not easily measurable (23) For McPherson, teachers tend to 'ignore the ultimate goals and to substitute intermediate goals that could be more clearly defined and were more easily related to the specific techniques she was using' (14, p 35) And, more specifically in terms of order, this may lead to a situation in which, as Leacock suggests, classroom management becomes not a means to an end, but an end in itself (13) Thus means, which can be relatively easily specified, may replace goals, which are difficult to think through, as focuses for teachers' attention and discourse

In this paper, I shall argue that the isolated nature of the work situation of most teachers is a crucial factor in the generation and maintenance of perspectives on order and control Further, I shall suggest that teachers actively legitimate control strategies, my evidence suggests that typically they do so in terms of the 'nature' of children, their home backgrounds, and aspects of society in general

## *METHOD*

Teachers in three English junior schools were observed in action in the classroom and interviewed at length The interviews were intended specific ally to elicit teachers' perspectives on three aspects of their work (order and control, patterns of authority, autonomy and hierarchy) and styles and

methods of teaching. Some of these issues are discussed in detail elsewhere (16). Observation of classroom work provided a shared context and focus for subsequent interviews, as well as enabling an assessment of teachers' work situations to be made. The schools will be referred to as 'Village', a rural school in the Midlands, 'Estate', a very large school in a south London housing estate, and 'City', a middle-sized school in an inner-city area of London. Fieldwork was carried out between February 1978 and December 1979 and, in all, 45 teachers participated in the study. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

In the light of the work of Schatman and Strauss (19), interviews were informal and flexible. An interview schedule was used, but questions were varied, followed-up, omitted, or asked in different ways as seemed appropriate to the specific interactional situation, and so as to achieve the central purpose of encouraging teachers to articulate their opinions and ideas about aspects of their daily work in a non-threatening context. Many interviews were conversational in style, others more tightly 'question and answer', again depending on the particular relationship. Some later interviews focussed rather specifically on problems emerging from the analysis of earlier data; in this way clarification of issues and resolution of ambiguities were attempted.

## RESULTS

### *The isolation of teachers*

Teachers in all three schools stressed the isolation in which they worked, saying: 'You don't actually know what's going on in other people's classrooms, you are so isolated' (City); 'It's very difficult because I haven't been in their classrooms to see them so I wouldn't like to say' (Village); 'That's difficult to answer because I haven't seen all the teachers performing' (Estate). Indeed, isolation is so institutionalized that one teacher commented 'I don't really feel at ease wandering into other people's classrooms without a good excuse' (Estate). Teachers regard such visits as 'an intrusion which is awful. Really, you know, I mean it shouldn't be like that' (City). 'You get the idea that if anybody comes in, especially the head, then you know you're being looked upon' (City). And so, 'You feel very isolated and you feel definitely that it's you and the class because there's no music they don't even have another teacher for singing, you know, they have me the whole time' (City).

Nevertheless, teachers did make judgements of their colleagues (these quoted teachers included). When teachers were asked directly who they thought were the most and least effective teachers within the school, only a

few (two at Village school, for example) found difficulty in expressing an opinion, although some refused to name teachers Because of isolation, such judgements were usually made on the relatively visible criterion of order, this could be judged quite quickly and easily (e g , movement of class around the school, noise emanating from classroom, and impressions on brief visits) When teachers were asked on what grounds colleagues were classified, order judgements predominated 'Certainly from the point of view of keeping a class in good order, Mrs B is excellent' (Village) 'Well the children just go wild – you can be sure that chairs and desks will get broken' (Village) Further, teachers are well aware that they are judged on such criteria, even if they deny so judging others

> I think the area I become obsessed with most is noise because I feel if my class is making a hell of a row that people passing by and other teachers will think that, my God, his class is making a hell of a row, and I want them quiet, but I sometimes from time to time wake up to the realization that I don't want quiet for itself but I want it quiet because I feel that I will be criticized if I have a noisy class (Estate)

*Implications of isolation*

Teachers at the three schools were very vague about goals phrases such as 'getting on with each other' or 'achieving standards' or 'results' were used, though teachers were rarely able to explicate further But control was a domain within which teachers more frequently felt able to converse and discuss confidently and competently A good example of this is

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher | I've tried different ways with different classes and I now know I've been in long enough to know the ways that work and some of the ways that don't |
| Interviewer | What do you mean by works? |
| Teacher | The biggest thing is I find you've got to control the class from the word go They have got to know where they stand with you, they've got to know how far they can go with you (City) |

Teachers appeared to feel on safe ground when discussing order and control, who, after all, would challenge teachers' stress on its importance? Thus, for many teachers, order and teaching and learning are inextricable For example, order is

> almost axiomatic I couldn't teach, I don't think anyone can teach without reasonable discipline, you've got to know what's going on, you've got to know that the children in your class are working (Estate)

So order is reified; it becomes for the teacher a central test of achievement. A major consequence of this is that because teachers are isolated and because colleagues have fairly frequent opportunities to assess the teacher's performance only in terms of control, order becomes a signal to peers that the teacher is competent. One example of this is the teacher who felt he would be 'criticized if I have a noisy class'. Similarly, a young teacher, who had attempted mildly innovative teaching styles, said:

> I know when I started doing things in a different way that quite a close eye was kept – very, very tactfully. I mean no-one ever sat in my lessons but I know I was being watched (Estate).

Observation was necessary in case order was being threatened by the teacher's actions. The head of the same school appeared to confirm the teacher's perception:

> If you're walking round the school, as I do fairly regularly, you can tell the areas and classrooms where there's not effective learning (Estate).

The head proceeded to indicate action he would take in such circumstances, such as taking the teacher aside after school, or even intervening in lessons.

*The legitimation of control*

The maintenance of order, then, usually achieved by these teachers by dominance and consequent pupil subordination, although other strategies are possible (24, ch. 7), is essential. How can such dominance and subordination be legitimated? 'Domino theory' (11) was popular at each school as a means of legitimating teachers' powerful and manifest stress on control. The theory, never articulated very clearly, but latent in many teachers' accounts, was that chaos and anarchy would result unless vigilance was maintained. Any apparent weakness or chink in teachers' defences and indiscipline would become increasingly inevitable and catastrophic. Thus, for example, formal styles of teaching were usually favoured because control was seen as being made easier and teachers frequently evaluated formal and informal styles in terms of order. For example, at Village school, formal and informal styles were evaluated respectively as 'orderliness' and 'chaos'. Informal styles were seen as giving rise to 'free-for-alls in the classroom, general muddle – a sort of wild indiscipline.' Another teacher commented 'I don't like the general, shall I say free-for-all, in the informal situation.' At this school, discipline problems were viewed as infrequent and minor due to prevailing formal styles: 'This school, discipline-wise, has always been excellent, but you can go to others and find, you know, very unruly children.' Similarly at Estate school: 'If you're sort of teaching

informally and they're all doing different things and chattering about different things I think the noise level tends to rise up more ' 'In such a large school if things did become freer it could be chaotic ' And at City school, informal styles were seen as 'wildly free' or as 'children having a lovely free-for all and doing very little ' For many teachers, then, any relaxation of control, such as was perceived to be involved in teaching less formally, could lead instantly and irrevocably to the chaos thought to have occurred at William Tyndale School, informal styles could be 'children doing what they want and to hell with discipline or organization' (City) In such circumstances, unless the teacher is 'very good, the children are going to riot, aren't they?' (Village) Similarly, a head, while mildly critical of the structures and organization he inherited, views what he sees as the alternative with alarm

> It's a formal school in that sense and over cosseted (sic) towards discipline But then you know, if it's to be a learning situation, what are you to do – have riots, no learning? (Estate)

A deputy suggests a variant of the theory

> What I have found with class X is that there are often more disciplinary problems with kids sort of sparking things off in the classroom and then taking it out into the playground – and even going home as well (Village)

Thus without constant vigilance and the maintenance of control through formal styles, schools would irresistibly lurch towards anarchy, as one teacher explained had occurred

> It wasn't teaching, it was not control when I started It was discipline all the time You were working, working, working to get discipline and I didn't really do any teaching I just kept them quiet with things It was terrible This school is far better than my first school in respect of discipline It is – I mean you've got support, you don't get bowed under by rebellious and anti authoritarian children who refuse to do what you tell them and know perfectly well that they can get away with it because the headmaster's not going to say anything to them and nobody's going to say anything I mean, this is what I was up against at my first school, whereas here it's very much more controlled Everybody has very few discipline problems at all The whole atmosphere in school is more disciplined It's got to come from the top, hasn't it? (City)

One reason that was advanced by teachers to explain the tendency to lapse into disorder concerns the nature of children, a head presents an almost

Durkheimian thesis:

> I don't believe that children are naturally good. I work from that base. I think if they're left to their own devices, they wouldn't naturally be good, I think children have to be taught, they have to be encouraged and all the rest of it in order to at least keep up the standard of civilization which we've acquired. I can't quote it now, but someone said, what is it: teachers are faced with a horde of barbarians (Village).

More generally, teachers referred to the characteristics of 'these children' as necessitating tight control. For example,

> The children are not the easiest children to work with discipline-wise, and formal, formal approach again is easier in the maintenance of discipline (Estate).

> You've got to be consistent with these children. They're insecure anyway and if the discipline they know is variable, if you're hard on them sometimes and soft on them another time, they become even more insecure (City).

Natural lawlessness is always a problem, requiring solutions appropriate to 'these' as opposed to other children.

> You've got to be authoritarian to a certain extent. I think you've got to be; otherwise there'e chaos particularly with these children who have little self control at home and very little self control. I think you've got to impose a certain amount of it (Village).

> I think children who are perhaps a little bit more sophisticated than these children create different discipline problems – the subtle remark rather than the blatant remark that we get here. I mean both need sitting on, but they need handling in different ways (Estate).

A further reason for the tendency of disorder to overwhelm teachers is the baleful influence of 'society': teachers saw themselves as struggling to counteract the effects of the media – especially 'rubbish subculture from America' (City) – urban stress and the break up of family units, low moral standards, problems caused by immigrant children, and, above all 'the most pressing problem for schools is counteracting home influence' (Village). Thus, for example,

> I think the lack of help from home is the biggest problem as far as that I've been faced in this school I have been very wary of what I have said or done and I soon learnt that a parent arrived very quickly after I had upset her child (Estate)

> School isn't seen as important nowadays Various parents think, oh well, he can have Wednesday off if you want It doesn't really matter if you don't go (Estate)

> Parents are a lot more lax than they were I think you can put it down initially to the parents and then schools find it difficult to control them (Village)

> Since a lot of mothers go out to work, (children) don't have the discipline they used to have or any sort of social training (Village)

> A lot of them think that that money, you know, is more important If parents put that as the goal, if that's their value, their set of values, the children are inclined to copy them, it's a great pity (City)

The result of this, in terms of vandalism, football hooliganism, stealing, 'self interest' not 'communal spirit' (Village), union militancy such as a situation in hospitals in which 'what goes on is decided by the fellow who mops the floor instead of the consultant' (Village), and all the manner of other social ills are, for the teachers, obvious

Teachers thus argue that disorder is contagious due to the anarchic nature of children, incompetent parents, and regrettable social conditions, and so a high degree of concern with the maintenance of control in the classroom is essential Further, not only are social forces (media, urbanism, family problems) bearing down on teachers with all but irresistible force, they are doing so with ever increasing pressure This theme, which could be called 'decline and fall', was a popular one in teachers' accounts They argued that in the (undated) past, social, moral, and educational conditions were better than they are today, and since that high point, things in general have suffered decline As in other studies of teachers (14, 17), in the three schools, teachers' accounts contained plentiful examples of this 'Rebecca Myth' (7), they concerned in particular, decline in standards of order and control, decline in academic work, and a broad societal malaise Regarding standards of order and control, one teacher remarked on the 'growing lack of discipline of the children, I think I think this is something that has got worse as the years go on'(Estate) Another said 'Throughout the country really discipline

is a problem, more of a problem now than it was before' (Estate). Academic standards had fallen too: 'I think that on the basics in lots of cases the standards – standards are not as high as they were' (Estate); 'I think the standards in primary schools are far lower than they should be' (Estate); 'Standards were higher I'm sure before and children worked towards these standards and I think made more success of it than they seem to nowadays' (City). In the wider society, teachers observe

> the lessening of sort of what I call moral values, the things that used to be accepted as normal behaviour. Stealing, for example, is one. I mean now that's something that's grown out of all proportion in the last few years, hasn't it? (Village).

> It's general life isn't it? We accept things now that we wouldn't have dreamed of accepting. It's just our whole life has gone right down. It's not just education, it's sort of right across (City).

> I think there have been certain standards in the past and that there has been a slipping away. Not that there will be but that there has been, in general. I would just sum the whole thing up in terms of standards. I think there has been a fall in standards (Village).

The educational implications of these problems are clear:

> Teacher: You've always had difficult children and naughty children and mischievous ones but they, I think as a whole, they're entirely different.
> Interviewer: And worse?
> Teacher: Worse, ever so much worse (Village).

> If I gave a tables test now in the whole of the fourth year I would expect that seventy-five percent of them didn't thoroughly know their tables and I think that's appalling. And had that test been given to my fourth year when I was in the fourth year, I'm sure that it would have been round seventy-five percent did know their tables thoroughly (Estate).

The causes of such decline are variously attributed to decreasing parental adequacy (as suggested earlier) and the break up of the nuclear family, secularization, affluence, social class differences, or educational changes, especially in the supply and quality of teachers. For example:

> The break up of the family unit to some extent. Where in years gone by, certainly in my youth, we contained all our family problems within the

family, whereas now it's into medical hands, it's into social services hands You get all kinds of outside agencies (Estate)

Lack of influence of the church or christian teaching, let's put it that way Lack of, lack of the influence of christian teaching I think that's the main one, it must be, mustn't it? (Village)

Children are well off I mean a child came in today and said she'd had £20 for (her) birthday, and you think, my goodness, because what they have is easy-come-easy-go That book was nice for a day or two, but it doesn't matter now – throw it into the back of the cupboard and I'll have another one next week, whereas if I had a book it was a prize possession (Village)

Call it class consciousness if you like, but I mean the way their parents, their way of life, is probably not the same as my way of life (Estate)

Their (parents') language is different, their modes of thinking, their values, they've got to affect (children) (City)

I don't fancy having completely unstreamed and I think – I think possibly that is part of the decline in standards generally I would think that the mixing of classes and unstreaming is possibly one of the contrib utory factors (Estate)

Whether it's because of the comprehensive system, perhaps – I'm not sure (City)

When we were short of teachers, a lot of people were let into the profession who really weren't up to any sort of standard Well, I know this And of course they're now in the teaching profession until they retire (City)

I blame colleges for the standard of teaching I don't blame the staff so much because they haven't been set a standard I suppose it comes down again to this taking away exams (Village)

Whatever the aetiology of decline, however, teachers see themselves, Canute like, battling against the tide

| | |
|---|---|
| Interviewer | Your attitude is whatever the rest of the world is doing – |
| Teacher | Whatever the rest of the world is doing, I still think there is need for what I've said |
| Interviewer | These values – |
| Teacher | These values are permanent |

Change, then, for many teachers equals decay. While not all teachers utilized the 'decline and fall' theme (two, indeed, specifically repudiated it), it often provided a perspective from which to view the difficulties and tribulations of achieving control.

## DISCUSSION

I have suggested in this paper that teachers believe that order and control in the classroom are essential to teaching and learning. The dominance of teachers and the subordination of pupils is a taken for granted prerequisite of classroom work, because, teachers believe, real learning cannot occur in its absence. If children are well behaved, they must be learning; if they're learning then the teacher is evidently doing his or her job, and difficult and diffuse questions about goals and purposes, and the measurement or assessment of achievement do not arise. The teachers felt that it was very hard to measure teaching success; goals are cloudy and difficult, but in the area of control, one aspect of classroom work which is relatively easily assessed, they could and must demonstrate competence, because such would indicate competence in matters of teaching and learning in general. On the other hand, failure to achieve control might signify failure to teach children adequately.

This has implications not only for the teacher's self-image, but also as Pollard suggests, for relationships with colleagues:

> At the level of the school there is the staff/peers evaluation of the teacher – 'a good disciplinarian', 'hopelessly disorganised' – in which most teachers will want to secure a positive evaluation. The most important index here, and very much endorsed by the head teacher's organisational concerns, tends to be how well 'ordered' or 'under control' the teacher's class is (18, p. 40).

Thus, strategies for promoting and maintaining control are utilized in order that both the teacher and significant others (especially the head, but also parents and other visitors) can see that learning is in progress, and that therefore the teacher is competent. Because of social, moral, and educational conditions, and because of the innate nature of children, the imposition of order and thus the maintenance of dominance and subordination is a constant struggle. Such conditions are, indeed, getting worse; control is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve but no less essential. Its maintenance is then, for teachers, a substantial achievement.

In partial contradiction to the legitimations utilized by teachers, I have argued that because they are isolated, and because they must 'survive'

alone with large numbers of pupils, order becomes a substitute for 'educational' goals, the achievement of which is much less easily assessed Success in the domain of control becomes both for the individual teacher and for significant others an indication of general occupational competence Perspectives such as 'domino theory' and 'decline and fall' are used by teachers to legitimate their stress on dominance and subordination and to explain or rationalize their potential or actual failure In such ways, then, what Jackson describes as the chronic 'doubt and defensiveness' (8) of the classroom situation can be at least in part assuaged

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