# THE LEGITIMATION OF TEACHING STRATEGIES IN JUNIOR SCHOOLS

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Teachers classroom strategies, using evidence from interviews with 45 teachers in three English junior schools, are considered  Teachers advocated and utilized what they described as formal teaching strategies  It is argued that such strategies arise from the structural and organizational constraints of schools and classrooms and from teachers paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of educational processes, they are actively legitimated by teachers in terms of perspectives derived from such assumptions

It has been claimed that the dominant mode in English primary education, arising at least in part from the prescriptions of the Plowden Report (15), is 'progressive' (25)  Hoyle argues that British primary schools'

> basic approach is developmental in that the stress is upon nurturing the growth of individual children through shifting the balance from formal class teaching to the creation of informal learning situations with an emphasis on exploration  The transformation has been an informal, relatively unplanned and more or less a spontaneous movement (22, p 342)

However, a considerable body of evidence suggests that such changes have affected, at most, only a small minority of schools  Bennett (3) found that only 9% of teachers' 'styles' corresponded to those advocated and legitimated by Plowden, Nash (28) found that formal seatwork teaching remained the norm, Bassey's (2) work suggested that three-quarters of the 498 teachers studied did no 'integrated' work, Barker Lunn (1) argued that only half of the teachers in unstreamed schools were opposed to streaming, and that others in effect streamed children by their intra classroom practices, Boydell (5, p 55), on the basis of her research in

primary schools, concluded that the so called primary revolution is a 'myth', and very recently HM Inspectors in Scotland (17, p 46) discerned what they called a 'narrowing of the curriculum' within primary 4 and primary 7 classes Similarly, in England, the 'Oracle' project concluded that

> the general pattern of the traditional curriculum quite certainly still prevails and has not changed in any fundamental way, let alone vanished (9, p 155)

More generally, writers have noted the resistance of teachers to change Dreeben, for example, suggests that

> schools appear to be among the most conservative and unbending of institutions maintaining traditional ways of doing things in the face of intense pressure to change (6, p 455)

And Goodlad rehetorically asks

> is some stereotype of schooling so built into our culture that it virtually shapes the entire enterprise, discouraging or even destroying deviation from it? (11, p 91)

Resistance by teachers to innovation has been suggested by many studies (7, 18, 23, 30), such work has generally confirmed the view that the 'traditional' curriculum persists and that many teachers continue their work relatively unaffected by prescriptions for innovative teaching strategies

A range of studies use a basic dichotomy to analyze teachers' practice, the terminology varies, but the content appears similar  Some recent examples are  teachers as solution givers as opposed to problem posers (4), didactic or exploratory styles (16), production or craftsman teachers (14), and knowledge or child centred teachers (1)  Other writers have criticized such bi-polar constructs as over-simplifications of complex classroom events, and have advocated more sophisticated typologies (e g , 3, 8, 13, 19, 21)  However, a crucial consideration is that most, if not all, such typologies essentially consist of researchers' and observers' (and not teachers') categories  while descriptions and analyses of primary school teachers' work exist, few attempts have been made to examine such teachers' own construction of categories or to examine teachers' justifica tions for the adoption of particular stances in relation to curriculum or specific teaching strategies

In the study described in this paper, an attempt was made to ascertain teachers' own categorization and typification of classroom strategies, to describe their adoption of strategies, and to consider their rationale for the adoption and means of legitimation of such strategies

## METHOD

Data were obtained from observations and interviews in three junior schools in England between February 1978 and December 1979 Teachers were observed at work in the classroom and were subsequently interviewed at length about a range of issues, including order and control, patterns of authority, autonomy and hierarchy, and styles and strategies of teaching Some of these questions are discussed elsewhere (26, 27) At 'Village' (a fairly small rural school), all 11 full time staff took part in the study, at 'Estate' (a large school in a council housing estate), four of the 22 full time teachers refused to participate, and at 'City' (a middle-sized inner city school), all 16 full time teaching staff took part A basic interview schedule was used and all 45 interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed Following the advice of Schatzman and Strauss (29), interviews were informal and flexible, questions being varied or approached in different ways, so as to achieve more completely the central task of encouraging teachers to articulate their ideas, attitudes, and perceptions, freely and easily Some interviews were tightly structured, others conversational in style, depending on the context of interaction within the inter view setting The clarification of issues and the resolution of ambiguities were attempted in some later interviews by concentrating rather specific ally on problems emerging from the analysis of earlier responses

## RESULTS

*Teachers' strategies*
In the initial stages of the research it was found that teachers frequently used the progressive/traditional and formal/informal dichotomies (but no others) to discuss what they called 'teaching styles' or 'teaching strategies' Their understandings of strategies in such terms were discussed with them, often at great length, and they were asked to locate their own practice in terms of the formal/informal dichotomy All 45 teachers answered questions in this area Only one felt unable to locate himself, he regarded his practice of teaching as so idiosyncratic that no summarizing statement was appropriate The majority of teachers categorized themselves as formal, only one as informal (Table 1)

TABLE 1

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS CATEGORIZING THEMSELVES
ACCORDING TO TEACHING STYLE

|          | Village | Estate | City | Total |
|----------|---------|--------|------|-------|
| Formal   | 8       | 8      | 12   | 28    |
| Mixed    | 4       | 7      | 4    | 15    |
| Informal | 0       | 1      | 0    | 1     |
|          |         |        |      | 44    |

Since the understanding of teachers of the meaning of such self
identification might vary widely, they were asked on what basis they
distinguished between formal and informal teaching strategies   The most
popular distinction was between whole class teaching (formal) and group
or individual work (informal), followed by distinctions between teacher
instruction (formal) as opposed to children learning by 'discovery' or
finding out for themselves (informal), and between teacher control (formal)
and child control (informal) of such matters as content and pacing   In
addition, some teachers explicitly distinguished strategies on overtly
evaluative grounds, describing formal teaching for example as 'restricted'
or 'impersonal', informal as 'flexible' or 'chaotic', many more teachers
made clear their firm preference for, usually, formal strategies in the
context of other distinctions, and they are not counted separately (Table 2)

TABLE 2

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS CITING
DIFFERENT BASES FOR DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN
FORMAL AND INFORMAL TEACHING STRATEGIES*

|   |                                              | Village | Estate | City | Total |
|---|----------------------------------------------|---------|--------|------|-------|
| 1 | Class work vs group or individual work       | 7       | 12     | 12   | 31    |
| 2 | Instruction vs finding out                   | 7       | 3      | 6    | 16    |
| 3 | Teacher vs child control of content or pacing| 4       | 5      | 4    | 13    |
| 4 | Evaluative                                   | 3       | 2      | 3    | 8     |
|   |                                              |         |        |      | 68    |

* Some teachers contrasted strategies in more than one way

Taking teachers' distinctions as a basis, then, a formal teaching strategy is one where lessons are dominated by teacher talk and instruction, where the class works as a whole, where emphasis is placed on written exercises at desks from texts, blackboard, etc , and where there is little child move ment or interaction   In contrast, an informal teaching strategy is one in which children work on individual or group assignments, where they move and interact relatively freely, where the products of work are more varied, and where teacher talk and instruction do not dominate classroom events

Although nearly a third of the teachers claimed to utilize a mixture of formal and informal strategies, lessons observed in all three schools, with very few exceptions, were of the first rather than of the second type Indeed, of the 93 lessons or teaching sessions observed, only five (involving three teachers) could have been categorized, using the teachers' own definitions, as utilizing other than formal strategies   Given, then, that teachers adopted and used formal teaching strategies, the question why such similar approaches should arise is important   Both aspects of the work context of the teachers and their own perspectives were crucial to this process, strategies appeared to be maintained by the organization and structure of the schools, and to be legitimated by teachers' perspec tives   While the main focus of this paper is on the latter, a brief note on teachers' work contexts and their influence may be useful

The structure and policies of each school appeared to provide a context for teachers' work which maintained and reinforced formal teaching strategies and, conversely, made the adoption of alternative strategies very difficult   Teachers drew attention to a wide range of factors which they perceived as significant in this respect, including the expectations of the headteacher, as exemplified in the syllabus and timetable, as well as more informally, the expectations of parents, the type and nature of avail able physical resources, the constraints set by the teacher pupil ratio, and even the architecture of the school   Such factors led teachers to conclude that

This is a formally run school and we haven't got the equipment anyway or the resources (City)

The syllabus we use, the books we use, because you go into other people's classes and they're sitting there in rows and they're all doing the same things (City)

Teachers teach very formally    The whole structure seems to be geared
for formal teaching (Estate)

This school works on the system, you've got a time table and you do
maths from nine till whatever time it is, and then English after, then
you've got composition this day and you've got geography there, and
history there (Village)

This school on the whole is geared for relatively formal teaching and I
don't think that has changed with (head) coming here (Estate)

We've got a syllabus for everything under the sun here, now for things
like history and geogrpahy I can quite happily work through a syllabus
and do exactly what I have to do (Village)

One teacher at City school summarized such organizational and structural
constraints perceptively

I used to do a great deal of informal teaching and I used to spend all my
holidays doing out lots of workcards and working out integrated days
    but there are outside pressures within any school really, and I think
in this school you're more or less forced to work in a formal manner
simply because certain things are demanded of you, and you have to
cover a certain amount of things in a certain period of time   We have to
do things like fortnightly records and we have to have covered a certain
amount of subject matter    You've got to have done a certain amount
of English, all right, and you've got to write down what you've done,
you have to have done a certain amount of geography, history, needle-
work, music, everything needs to have been covered and, in an informal
situation, I don't think you can necessarily cover all those things in
one week    There are constraints insofar as you have to — if you say
you don't do a certain topic (head) might say, you know, why haven't
you done this, sort of thing   He ticks off the things that you've done
and the things you haven't done

One further and particularly interesting example of the influence of such
school structures on teaching strategies is provided by a case discussed by
two Village school teachers

Teacher          It's the way the school is run but I know that when
                 Mrs F came here she didn't teach that way at all, because

she was basically using groups and —

Interviewer:    She had problems?

Teacher:        No, she was just using groups, and it took her a little
                while but gradually she had to adjust to the school ways
                as well, and it was difficult.

Mrs F herself commented:

The children aren't used to informal ways. I tried them when I first
came here on different — doing different things and it just didn't work
because they weren't used to it, they spent the entire time wondering
what the other groups were doing .... I think it's just the way they've
been brought up, you know they're just not used to informal ways
.... I think it's the way the school is run.

In such ways, then, the organization and structure of the school, the
context of teachers' work, provided a framework within which teachers'
strategies operated.

*The legitimation of strategies*

While the factors discussed above were important, formal teaching
strategies were not adopted and maintained by teachers in a passive way.
Rather, they were justified and legitimated actively. Teachers believed
that not only did such strategies operate in fact, and not only was their
work context one in which they were effectively maintained, but they
were good and worthwhile since they enabled teachers and pupils to
achieve efficiently the goals of education. In other words, teachers'
paradigmatic assumptions of what education is, and consists of, and should
be, led to their adoption of perspectives which legitimated formal strate-
gies, quite apart from objective organizational or structural constraints
upon their work.

The paradigm within which teachers operated was one most succinctly
described as 'transmission' (12). This was an unstated and taken for
granted assumption about educational processes that essentially the
teachers' task in the classroom domain involved the transference of know-
ledge from teacher to pupil. Such knowledge was conceived of specifically:
it was a set of given, hard, objective facts and 'skills' which the teacher
(uniquely) possessed, and which pupils must acquire. No teacher explicitly

or implicitly doubted the idea that his or her task was such transmission, although how it could most efficiently be achieved was sometimes debated or considered   But knowledge itself was always seen as that which the teacher had access to or possessed and which must be transmitted

> They come to school to learn and therefore I'm always telling them how important it is that they should pay as much attention, and if they don't listen, then they won't know anything (Estate)

> A favourite saying of mine to them is if you do not want to work you might as well be out on the playing fields (Estate)

The relevance of such an educational paradigm to teaching strategies is clear  since the business of education is the transmission of 'hard' know ledge, to the extent that informal teaching strategies appear to dilute the direct transfer of such knowledge, children cannot be learning   Such approaches, deficient in transmission, are thus seen as a 'skive' for teachers and pupils, the avoidance of the real hard business of teaching and learning

> It can just turn out to be a skive for the children, and for the teacher ten minutes peace and quiet while she sends the children round the school supposedly with a trundle wheel measuring things, and in fact they're not doing anything, they're just having a giggle and walking up and down the corridor   And sometimes it's a good way of getting out of doing any marking from the teacher's point of view (City)

Another teacher provided a cautionary tale of how informal strategies may be seen as ineffective in terms of transmission, as measured by 'results'

> I moved from Leicestershire and I went into (town) and I said I was used to the integrated day and had been doing so for the last five years and they made the most terrible faces, and the − this was in the council offices I'm not quite sure who, which rank, I was talking to − and he said, well we do have one school that's an integrated day and I don't know whether it's a coincidence or not but they're certainly at the bottom of the league as far as results are concerned (Village)

Formal teaching strategies are thus advocated because they enable transmission to occur more efficiently, in teachers' language, knowledge can be more effectively 'structured', and real learning, itself a difficult and uncertain process, can be seen to be occurring   For example,

Children in this sort of area with this sort of intelligence if you don't structure what you're doing then who knows whether they're learning anything? (City)

Formal teaching strategies, then, appeared to teachers to lend themselves to such organization and structure much more readily

I'm a formal teacher I can't cope with the other    you can so easily get into a muddle with it and I find I can't do it (Estate)

Teachers more favourably disposed to informal strategies nevertheless saw structure as crucial

Informal styles of teaching are very very much more difficult on the teacher, they have got to be extremely well structured, you've got to have structure throughout the school (City)

I would think that what is informal is so much work that the teacher can't cope with it just to check that everybody's done everything (City)

More usually, however, informal teaching strategies were seen as not lending themselves to what is really teaching, teachers are likely to be

overwhelmed if they're allowed to teach in a far too informal way    if you find that there are teachers who are so — I was going to say lax, that probably isn't the right term — so informal that they are not being taught, then obviously the teacher's not doing the job (City)

I think they're happier in a more structured atmosphere than a sort of wild indiscipline, sort of — which I'm afraid a lot of these informal schools seem to me to be getting to (Village)

I've come across in some schools that you daren't structure a child's day at all, that they must be totally free to do whatever they want at any moment, and I feel that is wrong (Estate)

We've thrown all the structure out and put nothing in its place, and I think we ought to swing back a bit and say well these are the guide lines, these are the things we ought to aim at (Estate)

The idea that children learn by being taught by teachers, and that such

transmission is most efficiently achieved~by structured work presented through what teachers regarded as formal teaching strategies was summarized as follows by one teacher

> I think on the whole that children learn more from formal teaching because most children have to be pushed     You do get some that will work and therefore would work well in an informal situation, (but) if you teach formally they know what they are doing, what's expected of them (Estate)

Such structuring and organization is seen by teachers as being more effectively achieved through formal strategies also because order and control are easier    Informal strategies, perceived as making order more difficult to achieve, are thus once again rejected, transmission is impossible without control, that 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)

Formal and informal strategies are thus evaluated in terms of order, for example, at Village school they were contrasted as 'orderliness and chaos' Other teachers commenting on informal strategies said

> I don't like the general shall I say free for all in the informal situation

> Free for alls in the classroom, general muddle, a sort of wild indiscipline

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 strategies were seen as 'wildly free' or

> Children having a lovely free for all and doing very little

> Children doing what they want and to hell with discipline or organization

While the teachers' paradigm of education as transmission, and thus their choice of formal strategies, could be justified in terms of order, an even more powerful legitimation was in terms of the perspective of 'basics' Basics are, archetypally, structured facts or skills which must be inserted into children As one deputy head very firmly put it

> I feel my job as a primary teacher, which I feel very strongly about, is to put the basics into these children, in other words so they can read and write which the secondary schools can build on (City)

Similarly,

> Once they've got the basic skills of reading, being able to express themselves in writing, and basic numeracy, you can then afford to widen yourself (Village)

Basics consisted mainly of certain aspects of English (especially grammar, punctuation, spelling, and 'comprehension') and of Mathematics (tables and simple arithmetical operations) These were, for teachers, of crucial importance

> I think it's important that basic things like reading and everyday ordinary sorts of mathematics be done, because basic work has got to be done before you've got anything to build on (City)

> There is a place for basics such as fundamental rules being taught I still believe there's a way of teaching spelling and teaching -- spelling can be taught -- of doing number bonds and combinations, tables, I think these we have tended to leave behind     Some teachers have thrown it out of the window with modern maths, they no longer see a place for tables in modern maths, I think this is wrong (Estate)

> I don't think we pay enough attention to grammar and presentation, especially the use of commas and full stops and paragraphs (Estate)

Teachers thus held paradigmatic assumptions that their central task was transmission This could be and was legitimated in terms of the perspective of basics, the acquisition of which through formal teaching strategies was for teachers an indication that such strategies were worthwhile In other words, such strategies 'worked', which was a central legitimation Teachers had a clear idea that certain strategies worked and others did not

We all tend to hang on to the things we know work and bring results (Village)

That works for me, the way I work works for me, and I hope it works' for the children (Estate)

I have tried it in different ways and this is the way I find it works best both for teachers and children (City)

Techniques, skills, books, materials, ideas, etc were confidently assessed as working or not, and reacted to appropriately

If it's good, use it, if it isn't, throw it out (Estate)

Prescriptions from sources outside the school rarely worked   For example, those of initial training in colleges

Oh rubbish, what they teach you in college, I mean they have all these airy fairy ideas, you know (Estate)

These lecturers have all these good ideas, but you know in practice they can't sort of work (Village)

The lecturers were so divorced from the reality of the classroom situa tion that what they dispensed in their colleges     bore little relation ship to being a practical teacher (City)

A lot of slapdash sort of mishmash      a lot of half digested theories (City)

In-service courses are similarly despised

I went on one once, it was a load of rubbish, well it was interesting, but it wasn't much practical use (Village)

A load of rubbish, just a sheer waste of time (City)

Formal strategies also worked in terms of order and control

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)

As well as evidence from within her own classroom and her own experience, the teacher could also rely on that from her peers   A number of teachers commented on the fact that formal strategies worked for other teachers   For example, a teacher at Village school felt that there was a

> high academic standard here which I feel I have to keep up with, and I couldn't let the academic side sort of waver and sort of produce lots of brilliant art work

And thus,

> The standard of reading of the children who come into my class is pretty high, and the standard of their other work, so you keep it pretty high

And such 'standards' are kept 'pretty high' by the use of formal strategies

> One further important criterion for assessing what does or does not work is the concept of busyness, if the children are obviously under control and busily occupied, then such classroom practice is one which works   So the question teachers ask of themselves and others is are the children busy all the time?

> I expect a certain amount of work from each child and I think unless I specifically say I'll be looking for this, they would be inclined to waste time (Estate)

> Most children have to be pushed, not all of them, but the majority   You do get some that will work    but quite a few children need to be pushed (City)

If the children are busy, the strategy works   Another advantage of formal

strategies then, is that

> From my experience — they're usually working steadily than perhaps at a loose end (Village)

Many of the perspectives used by teachers to legitimate formal strategies can be seen particularly clearly in a comment by a teacher asked what she meant by 'works'

> Well, if the children produce reasonable type of written work, or they're reasonably well behaved, or they seem to be getting something out of it, then you can justify, you can justify it, but I'm not a great believer in experiment for experiment's sake and I, you know, you want to have the satisfaction of being able to see some results, some concrete results (Estate)

'Results' or 'standards', then, could be achieved by the transmission of knowledge through formal teaching strategies    Such strategies were legitimated with perspectives called here control, basics, works, busyness, etc    Each (and even more powerfully, several in combination) was used as a means of justifying classroom procedures

It has been suggested that, in all three schools, policy and organization were reinforced by teachers' paradigmatic assumptions and perspectives legitimating formal strategies    However, it would be wrong to portray the schools as monolithically 'total' (10) institutions, irresistibly shaping teachers into conformity    In fact, while a number of teachers talked approvingly of informal strategies, the only teachers who were actually observed to use informal strategies in the context of class teaching were two teachers of infants at Village school, and one teacher of first year juniors at Estate school, who had been trained for and whose previous experience had been with infants    These are too few cases, obviously, to speak definitively, but they could be seen as rare intrusions into the junior school of the perspectives of teachers of infant classes (24)    Apart from these few teachers, in all three schools a unified set of strategies stressing transmission and structure was evident

## CONCLUSION

In an educational world encompassing notions of curriculum innovation, integrated days, vertical grouping, team teaching, project and topic work,

and new approaches to traditional subjects, an essentially conservative set of assumptions and perspectives and practices was in operation in the three schools studied  Staff were, it seemed initiated and socialized into 'ways of doing things' very powerfully  It has been suggested in some studies (31) that deviants in staffrooms are 'punished' by isolation, or may move out of the classroom into administration (14), or, in extreme cases, may lose their jobs (20)  In the three schools which I studied, teachers who rejected the approaches utilized by the majority of the staff had sometimes been cooled out years ago, as a headteacher suggested

> If people are too extreme and too much out of tune with what you're doing, then they'd see the need for a move as well as you'd see it for them  For that reason we've lost over the years a number of people that haven't seen eye to eye with me or I with them (City)

Or, more frequently, they had conformed to the 'ways of the school' (Village)

Previous research findings, suggesting that teachers regard traditional curricula and formal teaching strategies as most appropriate to their classroom work, are supported by the evidence presented in this paper Teachers adopted such strategies partly in response to the perceived constraints of their work context, but also because they appeared to enable teachers to achieve what they regarded as their central task  the transmission of knowledge and skills  Strategies were concomitantly actively legitimated in terms of such achievement by perspectives indicating that they 'worked' in terms of pupil control and busyness

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