SUBORDINATES' STRATEGIES OF INTERACTION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS

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Throughout the nineteen seventies we have been interested at Bristol in thinking about the various strategies which might be available to a "manager of change" in education. Writings of Miles (1965), Jones (1969) and of Benne and Chin (1970 and 1976) have been absorbed by our students and we have made much of Hoyle's observation that the sets of three principal strategies for bringing about change in human systems identified by those writers bear a peculiar resemblance to one another (Hoyle, 1970). We have invited our students to examine the potential of these strategies - power-coercive, empirical-rational and normative-re-educative - in the context of Havelock's 'RD and D', 'social interaction', 'problem solver' and 'linkage' models of innovation processes (Havelock, 1971) and we have stressed that these processes can be helpfully seen as interactions between three systems, those of the change agent, of the innovation itself and of the client or host system (Bolam, 1975); the change process over time we see as one of mutual adaptation between these three interacting systems, and we have explained 'failures', following the case study of Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein (1971), in terms of lack of understanding not only of the nature of changes proposed but also of the settings in which they were to have been implemented and institutionalised and of the change agent systems responsible for their introduction. We have written about these things for other students as well as our own (Bolam and Pratt, 1976).

In a world eager for educational reform with the necessary resources relatively easy to find we might have left it at that, regarding 'innovation' and 'change' as synonyms, interchangeable in our writing in pursuit of literary style. But then came the holocust - the oil crisis and strikes of 1973/74, rising underemployment of school and college graduates, local government reorganisation, the Tyndale affair, the threat of falling rolls in the secondary schools, college closures, cash limits, teaching career prospects sharply curtailed, Callaghan's "Ruskin speech" and increasing militancy among the teachers....the convenient assumption that 'planned change' was synonymous with 'desirable innovation' was no longer tenable. Senior management in schools now began to find collaboration, as distinct from compliance, less easy to come by from their junior colleagues who grew understandably less ready to risk their vital interests in the cause of change which took the form of contraction of their service. We had advised heads to lean as far as they could, while retaining the confidence of those (superordinates) to whom they are themselves accountable, towards the adoption of a participative

managerial style, employing influence rather than control strategies and inviting collaboration rather than compliance from their subordinates (Bolam and Pratt, 1976). There are schools (and hopefully there always will be) where this advice we offered in the mid-seventies to heads still holds good. But there are other schools (far too many of them) where this advice must now be called into question. Today the interests of senior management (or of those to whom senior management is responsible) are often apparently directly opposed to those of assistant teachers. Change strategies which are intendedly influence-based rather than reliant upon sanctions are increasingly suspect. More subordinates respond to managerial initiatives not so much with offers of collaboration as with compliance, resistance or even by ignoring the superordinate move.

In three Avon secondary schools earlier this year, faced with mid-year cuts in staffing which could not be implemented without significant revision of school time-tables, members of the National Union of Teachers took industrial action in protest. Although this was at first sight unsurprising, there were a number of features of particular interest about the strategies which the teachers employed. First, it was evident that they did not necessarily regard themselves as having withdrawn from participation in the work of their schools - they made themselves available in school to teach classes on the 'old' timetable and, in at least one case known to the writer, an active NUT member had agreed to prepare the revised timetable but without commitment to participation in teaching it; they regarded their action as being in support of the case, argued with the LEA by their heads among others, that damage inflicted by the proposed cuts upon their pupils' education would far outweigh any savings achieved. They therefore refused to participate in the LEA's planned change and, instead, set out to get it renegotiated. In pursuance of this objective the teachers in the three schools initially concerned adopted tactics which could be interpreted as 'regrouping' - or, in political science terms, the formation of new coalitions - once their early protests had brought no result. Action was organised on a rota system, involving many more schools with aims which included maintenance of a high level of protest while minimizing the impact upon individual children. Teachers from one school were shown on television organising alternative educational activities outside the school premises. Appeals were being made to the public not only over the heads of the heads, but also over the heads of the LEA. The eventual outcome? This still looks different from different viewpoints. In negotiation the LEA gave little, if any, ground in terms of restoration of teaching posts during the current academic year but no-one can ever know to what extent the strength of the protest and its surrounding publicity will have conditioned the future handling of teaching staff deployment. Many will believe, and act on the belief, that employer-employee relations will never be quite the same again and that, should the issue ever come up again, what was once regarded as a purely managerial issue could now be

seen as a proper subject for delicate "political" negotiations. In this context it is interesting to observe the possible development of a managerial technique, in which the staffing ratio for each school would be derived from curriculum considerations rather than the curriculum from the pupil-teacher ratio. Whether this will be enough to establish new legitimated routines and so to take the issue back out of politics into the managerial sphere, or whether political negotiations over staffing ratios will be transformed into political negotiations over the organisation of the curriculum - and whether such negotiations, if they come to pass, will be contained within the schools or extended to the LEA or beyond - only time will tell.

The key issues no longer surround the question as to whether teachers can be helped to respond, in their own self-interest, to the initiatives of enlightened benevolent heads. Today we need to understand the interactions between superordinates defending the interests of the providers of the education service, and subordinates defending their opposing interests. Common interests remain, or so it is claimed on all sides, although they seem to have slipped down the agenda of priority matters for attention. Such interactions are indeed 'negotiations' in the sense of the word adopted in the recent monograph "Negotiating the Curriculum" (Weston, 1979) which develops the idea in explaining pupil/teacher transactions in the classroom, thus

> "Negotiation implies that there are different interests to be reconciled. But it also implies some element of common interest on which the parties can agree"
>
> (ibid. p.41)

One response to recent trends, and it is indeed the response of some teachers, is to turn to their union at the first sign of difficulty. Another is to eschew the use of strike action in particular, even in the last resort, and to seek 'professional' recognition through taking this stand. But most teachers, I suspect, fall somewhere between these positions in their feelings and in their behaviour. Can we identify a range of 'response' or 'interaction' strategies, complementary to the change strategies available to management, which we would expect these teachers to choose from? Can we even move towards associating a teacher's track record, in the perception of those to whom he is responsible, with a concept of 'managerial style' which we proposed five years ago?

> '... "but in choosing his administrative strategy (i.e. his intended combination of control and influence strategies) for dealing with such a problem, the head is not a free agent; he is contrained not only by the nature of the particular task in hand and by his own personal inclinations, but also by the social and professional context in which the change is to take place and by his staff's perception of his own past record as a

> manager ... In the short term he is a captive of his own managerial style; the head who suddenly adopts an uncharacteristic administrative strategy invites scepticism - indeed he courts disbelief and distrust".
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> (Bolam and Pratt, 1976, p.19)

Since the concept of managerial style was built up from subordinate perceptions of superordinate strategic choices, this may be the best point from which to develop these ideas.

We may perhaps assume that, in one kind of ideal world, superordinates only use 'pure influence' strategies, that these are perceived by subordinates as intended and that collaboration duly follows; whether a superordinate initiative is accepted or rejected appears to be of secondary importance to the spirit of the interaction which, if advice offered is seen as rejectable without penalty, is one in which trust is built up and in which the prospects for subsequent collaboration are enhanced. We can also envisage another ideal or polar type of situation in which all superordinate strategies are intended as, and are perceived as, acts of control, inviting compliance as the response - but being met sometimes by active countermoves or by what may be best called passive resistance.

Here are the first elements of a range of 'confront-comply' strategies which might be adopted in response to superordinate control strategies. But before analysing these any further we should perhaps turn our attention away from ideal types to the real world in which 'compounds' of confront-comply and collaborative strategies are to be found. These compounds (of which that adopted by the time-tables in Avon citied above appears to be a good example), can then be regarded as subordinate negotiating strategies complementary to the earlier concept of administrative strategies as used by Hoyle (1970) and discussed by Bolam (1975) in suggesting that the use of incentives rather than sanctions can be seen as a significant variant on the power coercive strategy. We can for the sake of consistency, now relabel both 'managerial' and 'administrative' strategies simply as superordinate (negotiating) strategies. Similarly, following Weston (ibid p.42) who sees negotiation

> "lying on a continuum somewhere between confrontation at one end, and at the other committed co-operation",

we can envisage subordinate negotiating strategies which are compounds of co-operating with confront/comply. So it is the propensity of a subordinate to attach weight to considerations of common purpose (i.e. to collaborate rather than merely to comply) which is seen by superordinates as determining that subordinate's negotiating style.

INFLUENCE STRATEGIES AND COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE

Two main types of influence strategy have already been identified, by Benne and Chin among others, i.e. those which rely primarily on mutually recognisable expertise, irrespective of its source, to resolve essentially technical problems and those which rely on the acceptance by both change agent and client that effective innovation requires a change of attitudes, relationships, values and skills on the part of any or all concerned. The response, in either case, may be made by an individual or a group and may or may not rely on resources which are contained within the span of control of the superordinate in question. Thus, from a superordinate perspective, we can recognise four main possibilities:

- collaborative/individual/contained - e.g. the response of a trusted confidential adviser
- collaborative/group/contained - e.g. when the response to the head comes from a group of staff within the school
- collaborative/individual/extended - e.g. the trusted adviser with out-of-school resources
- collaborative/group/extended - e.g. ... this is the characteristic response of the 'problem solving group' with external linkage which 'progressive teachers' of educational administration have advocated, indeed eulogised, in the 1970s (see, for example, Baker, 1980).

CONTROL STRATEGIES: THE RANGE OF RESPONSES

Although the variety of control strategies appears to be less than that of influence strategies, most of the argument centring on the question of whether the recognition of some classes of sanctions is to be regarded as 'rational' or as 'compliant' behaviour, the range of responses appears to be wider. As in the case of influence strategies it seems important to recognise that the response may come from individuals or from groups and that respondent(s) may or may not call upon resources outside the span of control of the superordinate. The added complexity comes from the recognition of three modes of response to a perceived control strategy, rather than one. These appear to be made by complying, by passively resisting the superordinate move, or by actively confronting it. The twelvefold typology generated is exemplified below

RESPONSE STRATEGY	EXAMPLE
Mode scope level	(as perceived by superordinate)
comply/individual/contained	The response of a 'yes man'.
comply/group/extended	A group, such as a subject department in a school might use significant external resources (e.g. contact with an adviser) in choosing to comply.

passively resist/individual/extended	The response of an individual who has sought advice from his union, but has been advised that his case is 'unwinnable'.
confront/individual/extended	Adviser or union invoked by individual teacher (who may be bluffing) resisting what he claims is an instruction to behave 'unprofessionally' (The invoking of the head or a deputy in a dispute between an individual teacher and his head of dept. would also fall within this category.)
confront/group/extended	'Official' action in which outsiders are involved, leaving the superordinate unable to settle the issue by negotiation without prior reference to others to whom he is accountable (e.g. CEO., LEA., Chairman of Governors, or if superordinate is, say the CEO., the possibilities multiply again - DES., ACC., Chief of Executive of LEA., etc.)

So what? For the present there is little to add, except to note the possibility of further variants such as apparent collusion between superordinate and subordinate who may 'forget' and 'ignore' an instruction respectively in the shared but unstated recognition that 'hassle' is hardly conducive to creative teaching. Nor do effective managers look for Pyrrhic victories, as many canny teachers know - but few wise teachers risk calling the bluff of a superordinate who doesn't seem to know what it would cost him to win. It is, of course, the last two strategies which are of particular interest. Why do particular teachers in particular circumstances respond in these ways? Do we know? Is it researchable? Could the results of such research be used to clarify, and therefore improve, relationships within school hierarchies even where interests are conflicted? These are for the moment open questions, well worthy of our attention.

A final point concerns the vexed conceptual relationships between 'management' and 'politics' and between 'participation' and 'negotiation'. Is it the case that in 'managerial' thought not only the fact of hierarchy is treated as a given, but also many facets of its form? Is 'participation' then granted as a concession by those with access to legitimated control strategies to those without such access? Is it the case, by contrast, that in 'political' thought the form of hierarchies, if not the fact of hierarchy, is regarded as problematic, as potentially renegotiable at any time or place? Can 'counter' strategies be understood as a

rejection not only of compliance, but also of the managerial notion of participation, in favour of negotiation between parties neither of which is capable of completely controlling the actions of the other?

Seen in this light the behaviour of subordinates who seek to form coalitions (a political activity if ever there was one) to negotiate with their members' (managerial) superordinates cannot be regarded as perverse; it is only to be expected. But so too, should superordinates who are threatened with outflanking be expected by subordinates to seek to join strong coalitions. Whether such escalation improves the quality of decisions negotiated, or whether it merely serves to make less satisfactory compromises stick a little longer, is a moot point which can probably only be answered instance by instance. But perhaps all parties to disputes could usefully think through issues prior to their escalation?

If they do so, it seems that questions of 'autonomy' will come quickly to the fore - autonomy of teachers in schools, of schools in LEA education systems, of education committees in local government, of local government in the national context and, increasingly I suspect, of pupils and their parents in relation to the whole gamut. Those institutions which survive with their autonomy more or less intact seem likely to be those which can develop internal political systems, using locally available knowledge, expertise and political clout to resolve problems which are incapable of 'managerial' resolution without escalation. Is it schools not school systems, and teacher-learner relationships not organised classes, which ought to be the focus for development? Would the adoption of such an approach necessarily entail an unacceptable (i.e. non-legitimate) forfeiture of control by the higher echelons of government? If, as the growing insistence on accountability seems to indicate, this does seen to be the case in practice, what can be done?

Surely the problem will not go away? The crystal ball is but dimly lit, but perhaps real progress might be made by developing frameworks within which everyone, even the child, counts as a potential negotiator. It is in this sense that I believe politics, with a small 'p', should be a central activity in education - but perhaps it already is, although many of us in our managerial roles find this hard to recognise or to accept. It is more comfortable to think of oneself selectively granting rights of participation to others than it is to come to terms with our partial dependence upon them, especially where these 'others' are people we regard as less expert than outselves. But if we are to be truly accountable for the things we do in their interest, then I believe we have to be willing to negotiate with them, thus simultaneously recognising their legitimate interests and expressing our accountability. The problem of accountability will not go away, but it can be worked through.

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