Contemporary views concerning the management of change in the literature on organizational theory deal with the issue of change on two levels. The first is descriptive and seeks to perceive and list manifestations of change. The second is analytical and attempts to categorize change in terms of abstract concepts. Aims to apply a dialectical analysis to the nature of change in organizations in order to highlight the fact that social class as an issue in management theory has become marginalized. Intends to argue that the application of laissez-faire economics to welfare provision, especially in the sphere of education, is continuing to result in an unequitable system. As educationalists, if we seriously wish to provide an equitable system of education we need to develop a critique of how programmes of legislation, not just education, are funded for specific purposes by central government. The perspective advocated by these authors is obviously in stark contrast to the view that social class is marginalized when it comes to considering the implications of educational policy. This results in pluralist analyses which concentrate on the surface issues of power which, while of value, none the less ignore the structure of control in which power is exercised.

Since the late 1970s the debate on issues in education has been regarded in this manner. In recent years the application of market principles to education has been reinforced by a consumerist doctrine. The aim of this article is simply to highlight that these two disparate doctrines are undermining the ethos of an equitable system of education, especially as it was envisaged by the architects of the 1944 Education Act, which viewed education as an essential constituent of a wider welfare system.

Second, this article contends that in contrast to other major areas of welfare provision such as health and social security, social class is marginalized when it comes to considering the implications of educational policy. This results in pluralist analyses which concentrate on the surface issues of power which, while of value, none the less ignore the structure of control in which power is exercised.

Since the late 1970s the debate on issues in education in both the popular media and among educationalists has increasingly been concerned with the efficient application of market principles, and how ideas from organizational theory can be applied to schools. It has arguably been an attribute of all governments since Callaghan (1976-79) that they have been successful in defining education as an individual consumer item. This need to define education in relation to economic necessity stems from the insecurities of the oil crisis of 1973, when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries sanctioned the West for supporting Israel during the Arab-Israeli War.

It is natural that sustained social change or upheaval should sharpen questions concerning the adequacy of existing social institutions. However, Callaghan, in focusing on the labour market while making his speech in 1976 at Ruskin College, unwittingly paved the way for the Black Paper authors campaign (Cox and Boyson, 1975; 1977; Cox and Dyson, 1969a, 1969b, 1970) to gain academic respectability and dominance. The perspective advocated by these authors is obviously in stark contrast to the view that prevailed among social democratic thinkers in the period 1945-1975, which held the view that those agencies of the State which were involved in welfare provision such as education, health and social security would combat inequality. The collapse of this post-war consensus on welfare was the result of the re-emergence of mass unemployment which shattered the hopes of those who believed a growing economy would be the remedy to Beveridge’s “evil giants”.

The Beveridge Report (1942) had assumed that full employment was possible and that this in turn would create the wealth required to support universal welfare. This turned out to be quixotic, and has resulted in right-wing thinkers arguing that an “enterprise culture” would have to be developed as the mechanism for delivering welfare provision and change. Successive governments since 1979 have set out to change the thinking of the British people in order to encourage the growth of the enterprise culture. While the opportunities to extend the enterprise culture into those agencies responsible for welfare provision such as health and education initially appeared limited, Lady Thatcher nonetheless was to surprise those on the left of the political spectrum with the ingenuity shown by her successive administrations.

This is of course is not the first time that education has been regarded in this manner. The laissez-faire economics of the late nineteenth century were used as part of an economic paradigm, which declared that society was best regulated by the interplay of free market forces with limited interference from the State. Although interference was considered justified in the case of education.

In the nineteenth century, laissez-faire economics were linked to Jeremy Bentham’s philosophy of utilitarianism. The utilitarians, like the Office for Standards in Education, had an obsession with useful knowledge and tests; monitory classes for the poor, and a middle-class university for London; the poor to work intelligently, and the middle class to govern intelligently. This mixture of classical economics and teleological theory resulted in a philosophy of education which allowed teaching methods, the curriculum, and education policy to be determined by consumer requirements.
As with the situation in which we find ourselves today, schools and universities were business concerns, their curriculum determined by the requirements of a small elite social group. This education was essentially concerned with character building, and preparing a small elite for subsequent administrative and leadership roles. Or, as we in our own time might say, providing a structure in which schools can specialize. As such, education was a desirable commodity to those with sufficient wealth who could choose the type of school and education they required; or as we might say to those who are “owner-occupiers”, able to move home to secure a favourable school placement.

However, an essential problem with using this consumer paradigm is that it requires the acceptance that the logic of change depends on Adam Smith’s “invisible hand”, whereby the achievement of individual interest is in the interest of all society, and change in societal institutions is to be attained by individuals competing against one another. It is one of the great myths of utilitarian philosophy that an individual can alter society. It is this concept which gives justification to the various kinds of social Darwinism which rationalizes practices such as the rationing of health care by many hospitals operating systems of “bed blocking”, and competition between individual schools. While Lady Thatcher may be happy to assert that there is “no such thing as society” (1989), anthropologists have long since established that societal development and therefore successful change is only possible when people combine their activities in order to assist each other.

There are a number of obstacles for those aspiring to extend the “enterprise culture” into the state welfare system via individual competing against each other. First, there is the attitude among potential consumers who have been socialized to regard health, education and so forth as part of a collective good, and may not be inclined to accept “cost-benefit analysis” being prioritized over social need in the assessment of service provision. The failure of consumers to display the behaviour patterns predicted by market analysts has always placed limits on neoclassical economics.

A further obstacle centres on the professional culture of those who were socialized as health workers, teachers, and social workers; to view the areas in which they work as a collective good. The unions, which represent these groups of workers, have continually expressed concern about market principles, which emphasise individual rather than collective benefit.

Finally, those advocating the “enterprise culture” assume that society is based on a consensus model of values in which all individuals will believe that certain goals are desirable, and therefore compete against each other to attain them. The basis of this approach is to generate an ideal from which reality is inferred, rather than starting with reality and inferring an ideal. This view fails to confront the issue that modern society is more appropriately defined by the fact that it comprises of competing interest groups. Hence they ignore the differences in class value systems, and the implications of these different systems on the nature of society and in particular organizations.

It is very easy to make a case for the fact that organizations are class bound (Doyle, 1995). The first structured organizations arose in feudal societies where one elite group imposed itself on another, more often than not through conquest. These societies became further stratified as different groups were formed to provide various services to the ruling elite as priests, merchants and so on. Radical organizational theorists argue that the same system is reproduced in modern organizations with the distinctions between owners, managers and workers, and that failure to recognize this is to ignore the structure of domination in which power is exercised.

Class conflict has certainly been the defining characteristic of British organizations since the latter part of the nineteenth century. The consumer approach to understanding schools simply fails to give consideration to the cultural and historical conditions, which have influenced schools. The point is simple: the culture and history of a country shape organizations. Conflict between different social groups has been a defining characteristic of British society since the industrial revolution.

The commencement of state education in Britain the Foster Education Act (1870) was a response to class conflict and middle class fears of an expanding industrial urban working class. The record of Foster’s speeches in Hansard leave no doubt that the Education Act (1870) was a measure of class control, which was to be achieved by control of the curriculum and pedagogy. It is not hard to draw a correlation between the Education Act (1870) and the overall structure of the National Curriculum, with its traditional subject boundaries; certainly at the very least it can be questioned for its conservative culture and its consonance with dominant ideology.

To analyse schools as organizations without regard to the issue of social class, and viewing government legislation to be “class
Class, consumerism and education

John Leo Doyle


...the concept of domination is intrinsic to the way in which we organize and not just an unintended side effect. If we are to avoid inequality in welfare provision, especially in education, then we must develop a paradigm that allows us to come to grips with the basic forces shaping society and organizations. At present the literature on the management of change fails to do this.

Contemporary views concerning the management of change in the literature on organizational theory deal with the issue of change on two levels. The first is descriptive and seeks to perceive and list manifestations of change, i.e. in terms of pace, technology and socio-economic changes. The second is
social class is not a neutral issue in education, longer ignore. It would be an issue that government could no capital cost issues that need to be overcome, “good schools” are to expand, given the large authority or hospital trust. For example, how the choices made by government, rather than approach focuses the electorate’s attention on met from the resources available. This agencies having to decide on the priorities to be contradictions that face organizations. It is therefore follows that in the agencies that contradiction analysis has major implications for the practice of social and organizational change, hence we do not have to accept a passive stance to social reality.

Dialectical analysis invites us to consider that the opposing interests of disparate groups can be used not only to define reality, but also be a mechanism of equitable change. If we adopt this means of analysis then it can have important implications for the manner in which we organize. For it implies that on the periphery of an organization are marshalling points for disorganization. This approach requires us to come to terms with the basic economic forces shaping society and organizations.

A dialectical understanding of the logic of change requires managers to confront the contradictions that face organizations. It therefore follows that in the agencies that provide welfare services; education, health and so on, managers will have to be aware of and prioritize the different class values that compete for dominance.

The dialectical approach would require managers at all times to highlight in any analysis the resources made available by central government. More importantly this approach will maintain at the forefront of all discussions the economic choices and priorities of central government, therefore making it more difficult for a government to talk in terms of “efficiency saving”, or welfare agencies having to decide on the priorities to be met from the resources available. This approach focuses the electorate’s attention on the choices made by government, rather than on the choices made by the local education authority or hospital trust. For example, how “good schools” are to expand, given the large capital cost issues that need to be overcome, would be an issue that government could no longer ignore.

In recognizing this, we are able to see that social class is not a neutral issue in education, and it would highlight the importance of economic factors in shaping policy construction and implementation. While a dialectical view would imply these tensions will always exist given that economic forces are the basic force in our society, it nonetheless indicates that individuals and society have a choice in how equitable societal institutions are.

In the late 1940s the suffering of the war years resulted in a demand for “welfare capitalism”, the economic and social tensions generated by the market were to be resolved by intervention, the education and health service in particular had an important part to play. This is the modality of power, which can be referred to as “social democracy”. Lady Thatcher disturbed the balance of social democracy by concentrating on one side of the consensus equation, namely market forces. This resulted in a breakdown of the consensus that characterised post-war welfarism.

The 1960s witnessed the re-emergence of the laissez-faire economic paradigm developed in the last century. A paradigm that is dependent on policies that emphasise competition, market forces, and short-term financial planning. Clearly this approach will not result in an equitable system of welfare provision. Undoubtedly if the original aim of the welfare state as envisaged by Beveridge is to be re-established then it is important to use a dialectical analysis of how governments intervene in the economy and welfare system. As this approach will enable a critique to be constructed of how market principles are used to control social change, and may possibly result in an integrative ideology, manifested in consensus politics and “social democracy”.

References