

Reform and the Culture of Authority in Schools

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The author explores the resilience of the normative order in schools and attempts by reformers outside the classroom to alter that order. The core of the order is the notion of the teacher spending virtually all of his or her time interacting with students. Central to attempts to alter that order is failure of the reformers to understand and appreciate the place of the teacher's authority. For teachers, legitimate authority consented to by students is essential. Otherwise in their dealings with students, they must rely on coercion, threats, and punishment and engage in ways that defeat educational goals. Current reform attempts, by treating teachers as passive receivers of external advice, serve to undermine teachers' legitimate authority. Rather than reform, the result is teacher resistance and student disengagement.

Education reform in America follows deep cycles of optimism and pessimism. The peaks are periods like the growth of the common school in the nineteenth century, the Progressive movement in the early twentieth century, and the Great Society programs of the mid-1960s. These periods are characterized by optimism about the ability of schools to change in response to new social and political demands and to solve social problems. Between these peaks are valleys of skepticism about the value of schools, their responsiveness to society's demands, and the effectiveness of previous reforms. Often, the wreckage of one era's reforms provides fuel for the next, for example, reactions to progressive education prompted a resurgence of the standard curriculum, and the reaction to government intervention in the name of equity during the 1960s led to the preoccupation with excellence that characterizes the 1980s.

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A common theme of the literature on educational reform is that these large cycles of reform and reaction have had little effect on the way teachers teach, the way students are expected to learn, and the way knowledge is defined in schools. To be sure, the common school movement and the expansion of secondary schooling that followed it had significant effects on school enrollments, and on the amount of time young people spend in school before they enter the labor market. Also, various changes in curriculum and testing have had discernible effects over the past half-century on what gets taught at a given level, and on how much a minimally educated student is expected to know. But most students of educational reform see these large, glacial changes as masking an enduring continuity in what teachers and students do in classrooms. "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose," is carved over the archive of research on school reform.¹

This essay is about this continuity of practice and its roots in the political and organizational culture² of schools. Specifically, I focus on how authority is constructed within schools and between schools and their environment—that is, how inequalities are justified; how these inequalities are expressed in the symbols, social structure, norms, and incentives of daily life in schools; how this authority is constructed; and how the construction of authority affects attempts to reform the schools.

I choose to study authority because that is where politics, or policy, intersects with content and pedagogy in schools. I am a student of public policy, a lapsed political scientist, who has for some time studied the effect of public policy on schools. Increasingly, my analytic interest in policy has come to focus on the role that policy plays in constructing the normative order within which teachers and students learn. One name for this normative order is "culture." One major way that culture affects teachers and students is by defining and legitimating inequality. A legitimate basis for inequality is another name for authority (Cohen, in press; Gage, 1978; Goodlad, 1984, pp. 93-129, 265; Hostker & Ahlbrand, 1969).

Hence this essay is about the roots of resistance or inertia in schools toward reforms directed at their most basic activities—daily teaching and learning. I examine several existing theories that have been advanced to explain this response, and I develop a complementary perspective. I also suggest some constructive ways to shape what teachers teach, how they teach it, and what students learn.

CONTINUITIES OF PRACTICE

Most classrooms, in most schools, have basic realities of daily life:

(1) The day is divided into discrete units of time allocated to discrete units of subject matter, even though content may vary from day to day, depending on school scheduling practices, teachers' pacing of content, and unanticipated interruptions.

(2) For each unit of time, a single teacher works with a group of children in a single classroom. Sometimes a single group of students sees different teachers over the course of the day, sometimes different groups of students rotate through teachers, and sometimes teachers are joined by other adults (aides, student teachers, observers), but the dominant pattern for allocating students to teachers is one adult to a group for a fixed period of time.

(3) Teachers' work is defined almost entirely as time spent with students. Elementary school teachers typically spend virtually the whole working day alone with children. Secondary school teachers are often given time during the day for preparation or other activities. Most teachers spend some time outside of class preparing to teach and evaluating students' work. For the most part, though, teachers' work is defined as being in classrooms with students.

(4) Whole-group instruction dominates small-group or individual instruction. A single teacher is formally responsible for the whole group, which means maintaining discipline, organizing the group's activities, and covering the allotted material. Of necessity, this means teachers primarily focus on whole-group instruction, varied occasionally with small-group or individual instruction. The presence of other adults allows some flexibility in classroom organization but usually does not disturb the dominant pattern.

(5) Within a given classroom, the teacher initiates instruction, and teacher talk dominates teacher-student interaction. Teachers initiate questions; students are expected to reply with the correct answer. Less frequently, students are asked for their opinions on teacher-initiated questions. Students' individual work is typically "seatwork," in which they are expected to complete teacher-specified tasks, with the teacher performing the role of tutor for selected students.

(6) Knowledge is defined as mastery of discrete pieces of information received from external sources. Instruction is typically organized around packaged bits of knowledge—for example, lesson plans and textbook chapters. Progress is judged by students' ability to recite facts

at regular intervals—section and chapter tests, midterm and final examinations.

For the most part, then, education means that a single teacher spends most of the day conveying discrete bits of knowledge to a group of students for fixed periods of time; "teaching is telling, learning is accumulation, and knowledge is facts" (Cohen, in press). Larry Cuban (1984), in his study of teaching practices between 1890 and 1980, found more deviation from these patterns at the elementary than at the secondary level and significant variation during the Progressive Education period of the 1920s and 1930s and the open classroom period of the 1960s, but he also found remarkable resilience in these dominant patterns over time.³ Sarah Lightfoot (1983), in her study of exemplary high schools, identified schools that found novel ways to accommodate wide ranges of ability, achieve a high level of commitment to student learning, and to engage the surrounding community; but in the classroom, deviations from patterns described above were the exception rather than the rule. Studies tracking the development, adoption, and use of new science and social studies curricula explicitly designed to change standard patterns of teaching, from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, showed that teachers quickly reverted to standard practices and that the new curricula mainly altered the content of standard textbooks rather than teaching practices (see, e.g., Stake and Easley, 1978; Welch, 1979).

Explanations for the resilience of these teaching patterns fall under three main headings. One explanation focuses on the realities of mass education. Public schools are expected to provide universal access, daytime custody, and education to large numbers of students who are, for the most part, required or expected to attend school regardless of their interest or aptitude for academic learning. Schools are also expected to respond to signals from various constituencies—local boards, universities, business interests, parents, legislators, and so on—about what students should know. These two imperatives reduce schooling to what is called "batch processing" (Cusick, 1973; Lieberman & Miller, 1984, pp. 40-42), in the language of industrial organization. That is, the "materials" (students) are assembled into standard batches (classes) and are processed (taught) according to predictable steps or stages, within well-defined constraints of time and space. This is the most efficient, predictable, and reliable way to handle the large volume of clients that public schools are forced to accommodate.

Wide variations in production processes among schools or classrooms

raise serious issues of efficiency (why is School X spending more per pupil than School Y?) or equity (why do students in School X receive more teacher time than in School Y?). So the simplest way of serving all children in accordance with external demands is to create standardized and predictable production processes. Once in place, these production processes become very difficult to change precisely because they are reinforced by external demands.

Another explanation for the resilience of standard modes of practice is that they compensate for teachers' variations in attributes and abilities. Any mass public service, of which public education is one, involves large numbers of individual providers. With large numbers comes a wide range of attributes and abilities. Furthermore, education must compete in a larger labor market for teachers. The quality of the teaching force is sensitive to temporal and regional variations in the availability of skilled talent and the public's willingness to pay for it. The rational response to these variations is to structure teaching practice to minimize the effects on students of differences among individual teachers. Using external structures (subjects, periods of time, and so on) and occupational norms (order in the classroom, class rules, and so on) limits the range of acceptable practice and protects the individual teacher and the school system by ensuring some minimal level of uniformity.

A third explanation for resilience is that schools, as public bureaucracies—lacking the strong external signals about the quality of their services that are present in the private sector—tend to perpetuate self-serving and unproductive employee behavior (Michelson, 1980; Pincus, 1974). We could argue that practices as they are limit the interaction between teachers and students, control the amount of work required of teachers and administrators, and minimize the effect of external disturbances on adults in schools. Whether these practices promote student learning or improve the quality of what is taught is of little consequence to teachers and administrators, because there is no direct relationship between what clients pay and whether schools survive. Standard modes of practice persist because they minimize the work required of everyone in schools, and there is no way to signal to schools directly that they are unproductive.

These three explanations locate responsibility for the resilience of standard modes of practice in three different places—the external environment of schools, the characteristics of the people who work in schools, and the organizational incentives of public education. Likewise,

they implicitly carry different explanations for the failure of school reform. In the first instance, reforms fail because the larger institutional imperatives of public education—dealing with masses of students and meeting external expectations—overwhelm attempts to change specific practices. In the second instance, reforms fail because they have to be reduced to a form that is compatible with the wide range of abilities represented in the teaching force; reducing them trivializes their impact. In the third instance, reforms fail because the institution's defenses are strong enough to resist reforms that require large changes in its self-serving routines and to co-opt those that don't.

The view that denigrates standard modes of practice may itself be subject to criticism. The first line of attack might be that there is nothing harmful in these standard modes of practice, even if they exist, because most students seem to learn whatever they need to know to function well in society. Criticism of standard modes of practice, the argument goes, represents a kind of academic eliteness that might appeal to researchers but has no useful place in the nitty-gritty world of teaching. For most teachers, in most settings, with most students, standard modes of practice work well enough.

Another line of attack might be that focusing on standard modes of practice diverts attention from the considerable variation among teachers in patterns of practice and in degrees of expertise about the match between practice, subject matter, and student attributes. Some teachers unreflectively execute standard practices, the argument goes, but many other teachers invest substantial energy in expanding their repertoire beyond these practices, and still others consciously choose standard modes of practice because they have judged them to be the most effective way to teach, given the subject matter and the conditions under which they must work. Those who criticize standard modes of practice, the argument continues, fail to account for variations in practice and the role of teacher judgment in determining the appropriate match of subject matter and instructional practice.

A third line of attack might be that the idea of standard modes of practice is an artificial construct created by researchers to put distance between themselves and teachers. Teachers do not see themselves as merely executing standard routines, even though researchers might see that when they observe teachers. Rather, teachers see what they do as a more finely variegated and subtle activity, consisting of adapting content, structure, and behavior to variations among students and resolving certain recurring dilemmas that grow out of diverse student

needs and organizational constraints (Lampert, 1985; Lieberman & Miller, 1984, pp. 20-21, 40-50). If researchers see only standard patterns in this activity, it is because they are not observing the right things.

A final line of attack might be that standard modes of practice don't accurately capture what empirical research tells us about teacher practice and effectiveness. For example, so-called process-product research on elementary teachers shows that (a) teachers differ significantly in classroom management and instructional skills, (b) these skills are related to student achievement, and (c) teachers can acquire these skills (Good, 1979). The problem might be less that there are observed regularities in practice than that these regularities don't correspond to what we know from empirical research about effective teaching.

Running through these critiques are several common threads: first, that teachers know something about certain problems of practice that many outside observers don't know or find it difficult to understand without direct exposure to teaching practice; second, that the resilience of certain practices may often be based on deliberate judgments about what works for certain types of students under certain conditions; third, that there is often a tension between the practices that teachers use and those they might use if they were faced with different constraints of time, subject matter, organization, and student attributes; and fourth, that systematic inquiry of various kinds can affect teachers' and outside observers' ideas of what it is possible to do within a given array of constraints.

Likewise, these critiques also carry a variety of explanations for why school reforms might fail. Reforms might fail because they are incongruent with teachers' cultivated understandings and deliberate judgments about how to teach, because they fail to take account of the constraints under which teachers work, or because they fail to present a coherent, practical alternative to standard modes of practice that carries the promise of significantly better results.

These alternative views of standard practices raise questions of the most fundamental sort about the normative order patterns of behavior, symbols, and norms that define authority, or legitimate inequality, within schools or between schools and their environments. If we accept the existence of standard practices, and see their resilience as a symptom of organizational failure, then solutions seem to lie in fundamentally changing the organizational form of schools, the characteristics of the people who work in them, and the incentives under which they work. If we question the existence or dominance of standard modes of practice,

we are still left with the problem of how teachers make key judgments about instructional practice, how those judgments are constrained by the organization of schools, and how susceptible they are to external influence. In either case, it seems to me, we are concerned about who is responsible for deciding what good teaching is and for producing the stock of knowledge that corresponds to whatever is decided. This is the central question in constructing a normative order in schools.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORITY IN SCHOOLS

Gerald Grant (1985) has given a most useful and provocative analysis of the problem of authority in schools: "The way authority is instituted," he argues, "as well as the manner in which it is exercised, . . . shapes the intellectual and moral character of a school." He defines three levels of authority and describes how they have changed over time:

The American high school of 1900 was like an avocado. Its center of adult power and initiative was unified and virtually impregnable, its meaty middle layer of students was fairly homogeneous, and its skin of external policy was thin and clearly defined. The high school of 1950 was more like a cantaloupe, a good middle class fruit with a considerably expanded student body. External policies such as regents' examinations and curriculum guides in the more progressive states had grown somewhat, but at the center there was still considerable room for adult action and initiative. If the staff were more specialized, they were still bound together in a net of connective tissue. The high school of 1985 is like a watermelon, with a thick rind of federal and state policy, a greatly expanded and diverse student body, and no clearly definable center. Like watermelon seeds, the adult specialists are dispersed throughout it, and commands—often in conflict—issue from a variety of locations.

Playing off Grant's formulation, then, authority within schools is constructed⁵ by (a) teachers' predispositions to influence students' learning, (b) students' predispositions toward learning and adult influence, (c) (my addition) teachers' knowledge and skill in subject matter and pedagogy, (d) the structure of adult work in schools, (e) formal rules governing the structure and operation of schools, and (f) (my addition) expert knowledge about what should be taught and how. The first four of these are the seeds and the fruit, or what I will call the "core" of schooling; the latter two are the husk or rind, or what I will call the "shell."

Grant's metaphor is evocative in a number of ways. It portrays interdependencies within and between core and shell. It refracts dimensions of authority within a school, and between a school and its environment, while holding them in an organic relationship to one another. And it expresses the centrality of a normative order in schools.

Recent analyses of American schooling fit this framework rather well. Public school curriculum, especially at the secondary level, is characterized as "flat" (Goodlad, 1984, pp. 130-166). Standard textbook and workbook exercises requiring little beyond rote mastery of facts and set exercises and little in the way of commitment to learning from either teachers or students. Adult attitudes toward students' choices are characterized as "neutral" or lacking clear expectations about what constitutes worthwhile knowledge. Students and teachers are said to negotiate implicit or explicit "treaties," which, for the most part, hold serious intellectual engagement and effort to a minimum on both sides. Students, teachers, and parents are said to concur in a system in which those with well-developed preferences and claims to "specialness" are given specialized treatment administered by designated experts, while the "unspecial" get a kind of random swill of undemanding gruel. Claims to specialness are, more often than not, defined by legal entitlement, expert knowledge, or both. Worthwhile knowledge is increasingly perceived as coming from external sources—legislators, administrators, board members, bureaucratic experts—operating from legal-rational authority in the name of abstract principles—equity, efficiency, effectiveness—using "neutral" measures of resources and outputs to judge success (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985).

In other words, the literature defines a culture of authority in which teachers have little influence over the orientation or work habits of students; in which students can engage or disengage learning more or less at their own option without the expectation of adult intervention; in which teacher knowledge and skill is reduced to the execution of standard algorithms; in which teachers are given clearly subordinate status in a hierarchy that rewards status in direct proportion to distance from direct contact with students; in which teachers' work is defined in technical, specialized, and detached terms; in which key decisions about who gets access to what kinds of instruction are prescribed by rules external to the schools; and in which decisions about what gets taught are increasingly located in distant, impersonal, and legal-rational sources—tests, standards, textbook adoptions, curriculum guidelines, and expert opinion. It would be difficult to construct a culture more

antithetical to teachers' and students' assuming responsibility for learning.

Yet we are encouraged to believe that some schools manifest very different cultures of authority. So-called effective schools are often described as places where, among other things, adults have clear goals and high expectations for students; principals act as strong instructional leaders, monitoring teachers and providing useful feedback; responsibility for key decisions is located at the school building level; and students and teachers spend the maximum amount of time engaged in demanding academic work (see, e.g., Purkey & Smith, 1983, 1985).

Both optimists and pessimists seem to agree that certain basic dimensions of a culture of authority encourage academic learning: (a) adults in school exert considerable influence over the behavior and learning of students; (b) students accept that influence; (c) students view adults in school as knowledgeable and skilled and expect them to apply their knowledge and skill; (d) relationships among adults in schools are structured by the demands of the task of teaching and learning; and (e) adults in schools filter, orchestrate, and deflect external demands.

If we can define authority cultures that encourage academic engagement and learning, then why don't more schools use those cultures? The answer, I think, lies less in the failure of specific policies or practices than in the failure of educators and policymakers to understand how central authority is in the life of schools.

Authority is a reciprocal relationship, a grant of legitimacy based on an acknowledged inequality. The grant may be based on threat or reprisal, tradition, respect for knowledge or competence, or formal rule. We can revoke our consent if we perceive that those in authority are unable or unwilling to act consistently as they had agreed. For instance, if I perceive that the condition that legitimated your authority no longer exists, then I am not obliged to behave consistently with your expectations. I may no longer fear you, I may no longer respect your knowledge or skill, or I may no longer accept the rule under which you derive your position. I may also no longer acknowledge your superior claim to knowledge or skill, even though I accept your formal position.

If learning involves consent between students and teachers (it can be much more, and also a good deal less), then much hinges on the willingness of the student to accept the teacher's authority and on the teacher's predisposition and skill used in exercising that authority. Indeed, when these conditions are absent, very little learning can take place.

I have identified levels of authority. The first three levels, or the "core," set the conditions under which students assent to, or demur from, teachers' authority and the exercise of that authority. The last two levels, or the "shell," provide external legitimacy to the teachers' role, but they cannot create student consent to the teacher's authority or teacher skill in exercising that authority if those conditions do not originally exist.

While the core conditions of authority seem directly related to learning and the shell conditions instrumental to the core, it is also likely that all five conditions of authority may operate independently of one another. Schools A and B are both inner-city, predominantly black high schools. School A manifests a low adult predisposition to influence students' learning, low student predisposition toward adult influence, and low teacher knowledge and skill. School B manifests high adult predisposition to influence students' learning, high student predisposition toward adult influence, and high teacher knowledge and skill. School A is located in a local district that mandates strict curriculum requirements. School B is located in a district that relies heavily on continuing education to influence teachers' knowledge and pedagogical judgments. These examples illustrate the range of possible variations. They also suggest that basing policy on simple stereotypes of school culture, "black, inner city, low socioeconomic status," for example, may be dangerously simplistic.

When there is little student predisposition toward adult influence and insufficient teacher knowledge and skill to act on those predispositions, it seems unlikely that either districtwide curriculum requirements or continuing education will have much effect on student learning in School A or School B. On the other hand, the presence of a moderate predisposition toward adult influence and low teacher knowledge and skill could be greatly helped by continuing education. Strict curriculum mandates would seem to hold little promise of increasing student learning, except to reinforce adult influence against a hostile or indifferent clientele, or possibly to tell teachers whose knowledge and skill were low what to teach. In either of these cases, expectations for learning would in general be quite low.

External mandates may help in minimal learning conditions, but they seldom, if ever, reinforce students' predispositions to accept adult influence, or help adults to exercise that influence. In fact, external mandates may destroy interaction between adults and students in schools for two reasons. First, they force adults in schools to decide,

implicitly or explicitly, whether to consent to the legal-rational authority of those mandates. If they consent, they become agents not only of those mandates but of those who set the mandates, thereby losing some portion of their classroom authority. "I don't make the rules, I just enforce them," is the classic formulation of this posture. Second, external mandates introduce pressures toward specialization and hierarchy in schools. They often introduce status distinctions— "Chapter 1 Coordinator," "Resource Room Teacher," and so on. They require monitoring and oversight, "advice" and "technical assistance" about how best to comply. And they require "objective" judgments about performance. As Grant (1985) suggests, all of these consequences divide and disperse adult authority within schools, making status among adults more important than the influence between adults and students.

A similar observation can be made about expert knowledge that originates outside the school. Such knowledge—in the form of packaged curricula, one-day in-service training sessions on "relevant" topics, and indoctrination sessions on effective teaching or effective schools—sometimes helps establish minimal conditions of learning but has only weak influence on students' predispositions to accept adult authority and teachers' willingness and skill in exercising it. When teachers simply don't know what to teach or how to teach it and when their work environment does not help them learn those things, then expert knowledge could affect teachers' influence and students' predisposition to accept it. On the other hand, teachers with a well-developed sense of what and how to teach, and knowledge and skill grounded in student consent, may view expert knowledge much as they view mandates—as introducing status distinctions, technical jargon, monitoring, and oversight that shifts the focus away from adult-student interaction toward status interactions among adults.

These concepts allow us to see standard modes of practice in a new light. First, most schools rely heavily on formal rules and structures to govern the relationship between adults and students in schools. The periods in a school day and the content allocated to those periods are purely artificial constructs and have nothing whatever to do with knowledge or its acquisition. They do impose structure and discipline on student-adult interaction, attempting to assure that some predictable standard amount of material gets covered for most students in a given day, week, and year. But this heavy reliance on formal rules and structures to govern relationships among adults and students also removes key decisions about the use of one of the school's most valuable

resources—time—from the core of schools and allocates it to the shell. Schools and school systems that allow a high degree of discretion in the allocation of time to subject matter, in effect, strengthen the potential influence of teachers and students over learning, thus moving decisions about time from the shell to the core.

Second, in most schools, adults work isolated from one another, thus inhibiting the construction of a common culture of adult influence and authority in schools organized around teaching and learning. Teachers' work is not defined as the creation and propagation of knowledge. If it were, they would spend a substantial portion of their working day doing other things than transmitting facts to students—reading and writing in their area of professional interest, debating with colleagues, observing others' teaching, experimenting with new teaching techniques, engaging in noninstructional activities with students, and so on.

It should surprise no one, then, that schools tend to devolve into balkanized classrooms held together by mindless standard operating procedures—bells, periods, attendance rolls, grading periods, poor work notices, in-service days, testing days, and the like. Nor should it be surprising that students quickly recognize the absence of a common adult culture, other than that imposed by standard operating procedures, and exploit its absence by disengaging from learning, creating a complex youth culture that has little to do with learning and that regards teachers as lying a standard deviation below parents, who in turn lie a standard deviation below the lead actors in television sitcoms. Nor should we be surprised that school activities with the strongest common adult cultures—drama, debate, band, and athletics, for example—also command the greatest loyalty from students. Schools that recognize the importance of a common adult culture centered on the creation and propagation of knowledge strengthen the bond between adults in authority and students and define teachers' work in new and different ways.

Third, authoritative sources of knowledge about teaching and learning are usually found outside the school, in, for example, state and district rules, packaged curricula, standard textbooks, district-prescribed training, and state and district testing procedures. Teachers are not often expected to develop what they teach. Their work is organized to preclude any serious involvement in that development. Consequently, teachers have little choice but to rely heavily on external sources for what they teach; to treat teaching as telling, and learning as accumulation and knowledge as facts; and to view themselves as ciphers

for other peoples' expert knowledge. This reliance on outside expertise, in effect, puts teachers at a significant disadvantage in their relations with administrators and students. Because they have no authority from their own expertise, they must rely on the authority of formal position. They are forced into becoming bureaucratic subordinates to administrators and into treating students as even lower subordinates. Gifted teachers know how to form strong relationships with students based on mutual respect and knowledge, but school organization does little to promote, and much to constrain, such relationships as a norm. Indeed, if we believe the literature, the norm for both students and teachers is disengagement from learning and *pro forma* compliance with formal authority. Schools that recognize the importance of authority based on knowledge, rather than formal position, locate the development of what is taught with teachers in a significant way.

REFORM AND AUTHORITY IN SCHOOLS

Sociologists commonly view schools as "small societies," composed of multiple student and teacher cliques organized around individual predispositions, affinities, and roles, acting on mutual interests, regardless of the larger social purposes attributed to schools (see Bidwell, 1965; Cusick, 1973; Waller, 1932). My complementary view is that schools are "small polities," where definitions of authority are expressed in formal structure, face-to-face relationships, and external prescriptions.

Since Plato and Aristotle, the central problem of political theory has been how to define and construct the "good" polity; this dialogue has given expression to competing theories of individual rights and obligations and the state's claim to legitimate influence over individuals. These broad issues are given a narrower, more concrete expression in the construction of political order in schools.

William Muir observes that teachers have essentially three bases on which to construct a relationship with students—coercion, exchange, and authority. For the threat of coercion to be credible, he observes, the teacher must be willing to resort to physical or psychic violence. Coercion "turns civilized values upside down and reverses the civilized pattern of incentives. Where coercion rules there are no rewards for developing one's talents, empathy, trust and intelligence" (Muir, 1986). The best response you can expect to coercion in the classroom, he concludes, is passive submission—an outcome hardly consistent with learning. Exchange, he continues, involves the "purchase of submission"

through the use of rewards, friendship, prestige, and solace. The major flaw in exchange as a basis for teacher-student relations, he argues, is that what students want from teachers often bears little or no relationship to learning. Hence teachers often find their personal resources depleted with little in the way of educational results. Authority, he concludes, is the "moralization" of control. Teachers must, in the language of Rousseau, transform their might into right, and obedience into duty. This is done, Muir argues, through the creation of roles, or what I have called the legitimation of inequality.

Each role comprises a generally understood set of rights and duties, and defines what actions are permitted, obligatory, and forbidden to an occupant of that role. So long as one wants to work within the particular community governed by an authoritative script, one adopts a role, thereby linking oneself up with other role-players or actors.

As a basis for teacher-student relationships, authority if it is legitimated, or consented to, relieves the teacher of the problems of threat and punishment inherent in coercion and the problem of mutually agreeable purposes contained in exchange. Coercion and exchange appeal to individual calculations; authority gives teachers and students a larger purpose to which to subscribe. Roles may change, the terms and conditions of legitimation may vary from one setting to another, individuals may play a variety of roles, and the legitimate order may be challenged. But authority provides a basis for orchestrating individual preferences around collective purposes that is consistent with learning as a social purpose (Muir, 1986, p. 116).

The special problem of constructing authority in schools, which Muir doesn't treat but that we have discussed at length above, is that creating and propagating knowledge depends heavily on the teacher. Unless teachers are producers of knowledge and are seen as such in daily school life, their main claim to legitimate authority is undermined. Working conditions that alienate teachers from the production of knowledge and policies that shift key teaching decisions from the core to the shell effectively remove the only source of legitimate teacher influence that bears directly on learning, forcing teachers to use coercion and exchange to control students.

So the resilience of standard modes of practice is not simply a pedagogical problem, in which teachers fail to adopt newer, more enlightened forms of practice. It is symptomatic of a fundamental political problem: how authority is defined and legitimated in schools.

Reforms that make teachers into passive receivers of advice and knowledge from external rulemakers and experts; that use external prescriptions on content and performance to control what teachers teach; and that define the teacher's role as next-to-the-lowest subordinate in a vast hierarchy of rules, procedures, and sanctions—ironically, reinforce standard modes of practice and, more important, make it difficult to construct a legitimate political order within schools.

Most reforms prescribe how schools should be different—in organization, curriculum content, pedagogy, treatment of protected classes of students, and performance. Sometimes reform attempts to bring schools and teachers into line, to send a signal, to wake up a slumbering beast, to introduce a recalcitrant and self-serving bureaucracy to the realities of economic life and public accountability. At other times, reform takes on a more benign countenance—bringing enlightenment to the masses of schoolteachers who, through no fault of their own, have lost touch with current thinking about education. Both types of reform—the menacing and the benign—look much the same from inside a school. They look like someone else's ideas about what a school should be. Life inside schools becomes an attempt simply to maintain a predictable existence in the face of periodic external disturbances, which, like the weather, are difficult to predict and even more difficult to influence. Just as people in general adapt to the weather by constructing shelters, so, too, do educators take shelter from reform by constructing routines.

Occasionally—but only occasionally—reformers and educators flirt with the idea that schools are little polities where the central constitutional issue is whether the development and propagation of knowledge are legitimate activities. Progressive education was originally as much about constructing a political order in schools, and about schooling for collective responsibility, as it was about new modes of teaching and learning. Flashes of insight about how to center a legitimate political order on learning, not surprisingly, came mainly from within schools themselves—the inner-city high school where students view learning a legitimate activity, the suburban white school whose central feature is a town meeting designed around the idea of a "just community," the private school that attempts to teach students responsibility to each other, and the fleeting examples of schools where teachers report that their intellectual interests are taken seriously by administrators and students.⁶

If reform is conceived, not as jerking the leash or bringing enlightenment to the benighted, but as changing the conditions under which

teaching and learning occur, then there is no way to avoid changing the conditions under which authority is defined on six dimensions outlined above: (a) teachers' predispositions to influence students, (b) students' predispositions toward learning and adult influence, (c) teachers' knowledge and skill in subject matter and pedagogy, (d) the structure of adult work in schools, (e) formal rules governing the structure and operation of schools, and (f) expert knowledge about what should be taught and how. Conditions of teaching and learning will change, and standard modes of practice will rearrange themselves, if and only if reforms focus on the core—the first four conditions—rather than the shell—the last two.

NOTES

1.

The more things change the more they remain the same. . . . Any attempt to introduce a change into a school involves some existing regularity, behavioral or programmatic. . . . It certainly was not the intended outcome of the introduction of the new math that it should be taught precisely the way the old math was taught. But that has been the outcome, and it would be surprising if it were otherwise. (Sarason, 1971, pp. 2-3).

Characterizing the responses of schools to individually guided instruction, Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage (1982) argue,

Schools did not merely adapt the program, making modifications to reach the same goal; rather they revised both the technology and its espoused goals. Such revisions helped to conserve quite different institutional conditions—in each of the schools a different style of work, conception of knowledge, and professional ideology was maintained, and in each school these reflected (or were reactions to) particular social values and interests found in the larger socio/cultural community. (p. 4)

2. My working definition of *culture* is a classic anthropological one, formulated by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952):

Patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, . . . including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and . . . their attached values. . . . [And] norms for or standards of behavior. . . . [and] ideologies justifying or rationalizing certain selected ways of behavior. . . . Principles of selectivity and ordering. (p. 181)

3. Cuban estimated that somewhere between most teachers were unaffected by ideas of practice that fell outside the dominant pattern described above, that about 25% accepted different ideas but tried few of them, and that a small fraction, perhaps 10% or less, engaged in instructional practices significantly different from the dominant pattern (1984, p. 254).

4. See note 1.

5. I have deliberately used the awkward term *constructed* to refer to these dimensions of authority because I want to communicate that they are cultural artifacts. They are patterns of behavior, acquired and transmitted through symbols and structures, justified by ideologies. They vary markedly among schools, and among societies. That which can be "constructed" can also, in the language of the current intellectual vogue, be "deconstructed" (that's the end of the jargon, I promise) only by understanding its cultural roots and artificial nature. With apologies to Berger and Luckmann (1966).

6. These examples are drawn from Carver High School, Brookline High School, and Milton Academy in Lightfoot (1983).

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