

## Chapter 1

# Stability and Change in Today's Schools: An Overview

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### *Voices from the Classroom: Present and Past*

October 18, 1984

*Dear Mom,*

*I can't believe I'm writing you a letter, but don't worry, nothing is seriously wrong. I'm just writing rather than calling because I need to think my way through some pretty heavy career (and life!) decisions. Maybe it's the English teacher in me, but I've always found that writing helps clarify the issues. Since you've always been my best friend and teacher role model, I know you'll listen to my frustrations carefully, ask good questions, and (hopefully) not think of me as a quitter. The last point is really important because I've been feeling very guilty these days. Well, here goes!*

*After nine years in the classroom, I'm actually thinking of quitting. This is even hard for me to say because I have always thought of myself as a teacher. In fact, the matter seemed settled at birth. With you and Uncle Bob being teachers, I always had the sense that everyone just looked through the nursery window and said, "She's a nice girl. She'll make a good teacher."*

*In many ways, the family was right. I am a good teacher, at least most days. My favorite teachers were those who took a personal interest in me, and I always try to do the same with my students. I think it's in my blood and I really care about the kids, but Mom, it's also really getting to me. For one thing, I'm never done. Maybe that's what bothers me most, I'm never finished. Even last night, I looked at Mark, reading the paper with his feet up and watching television and I thought to myself, I'm always in the same position, sitting at the dining room table with ten thousand papers and books. It's a good thing he's understanding because I'm not communicative at night. I would just like, for one evening, to sit on the couch, watch television, cut coupons, and not feel guilty. I even feel guilty taking time to clean my house.*

*The money also bothers me; it just isn't commensurate with the effort I put in. My aspirations were never to be a millionaire, but this is ridiculous. To add insult to injury, when Mark and I go to parties, the response I get from others when they find out what I do is really depressing. Teaching just isn't respected anymore. And when I'm working so hard and not being appreciated, it hurts! I've come home and cried because I've put so damn much of myself into a lesson and then one of the kids isn't in a good mood and gets the class going, and that's it—all that preparation is down the tubes.*

*I know what you're thinking, Mom. All teachers have bad days where plans go down the drain; that's part of teaching. I agree, but kids are not the same as they were when you taught. I can even see a difference since I began. I see complete apathy, lack of interest, lack of motivation! I give an assignment and the next day maybe five students have done it, always the same five. The average kid is not like I used to be—loving school and doing all my homework. In fact, kids who are like that are laughed at.*

*Getting kids to work is only part of the problem. The other part is to keep war from breaking out. With the*

combination of students I have, it's like walking into the United Nations, only no one gets along. To be the only peacemaker among 30 warring nations is no easy task. I actually have fist fights break out among red-neck whites who hate blacks, blacks who know the whites hate them, and Mexicans from the migrant camps. Add to the racial and ethnic tensions, the usual adolescent skirmishes within groups, and you have the potentially explosive powderkeg I sit on each day. The first month I don't know if I taught my students anything but to respect the person sitting next to them. So much for the Dade County objectives #1-6 for English Composition! But how can they learn if they're afraid of being ridiculed or attacked?

Unfortunately, time devoted to developing tolerance and self-esteem is not understood or valued by my principal. All he cares about is good test scores so he wants every minute spent on drill and practice of basic skills by going page by page through the workbook. He also expects me to write detailed lesson plans, specifying behavioral objectives, procedures, and materials. I wrote them at first, then I rebelled. One reason—and I don't mean to sound arrogant—was that after nine years, I usually know what I am doing without writing everything down. Another was that I didn't want them to see that I wasn't always following the prescribed curriculum. But the greatest frustration was that I never got any feedback. They didn't check for content; they just checked to see if they were done. I'm already drowning in paperwork. I don't need any more secretarial tasks to take my time from the substance of teaching.

What I'm agonizing over now is whether to try something else. I have considered both going to law school and becoming an accountant. One of my best friends down here is an accountant and she makes twice what I do and gives, at the most, half the time. But would I really want to work with facts and figures all day? All of this is complicated by my desire to have a baby soon. If I can't take time to clean the house, how will I ever have time to take care of a child properly?

*Right now, the thought of teaching for the next 20 years scares me. How did you do it?*

*Love,*

*Karen*

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*October 23, 1984*

*Dear Karen,*

*I was surprised to receive your letter but not shocked to learn you're considering leaving the classroom. Over the past few years, particularly since your marriage, I have sensed a growing dissatisfaction.*

*I don't know how much help I can offer because teaching in the 60s was clearly different from what you are facing today. It's even hard for me to imagine the students you describe or the level of prescription you receive on what to teach and how. I vividly remember my first year of teaching. Not a single soul came in to observe me, let alone tell me what to teach. I recall thinking, I could be teaching the Communist Manifesto and nobody would know it! My principal didn't judge teachers by students' test scores. The main criteria for effectiveness were a quiet classroom and no parental complaints.*

*Still, I can relate to some of what you're saying. I had students who destroyed lessons, didn't do homework, and thought Julius Caesar was written in a foreign language. Believe it or not, most of them saw no point to learning the distinction between direct objects and predicate nominatives. I didn't have a lot of record-keeping, but I did grade 150 essays each week, with no planning period. Teaching has never been a 9:00 to 5:00 job.*

*So what can I say to my dear daughter whose major fault may be that she cares too much? I'll just raise a few questions.*

*First, on the issue of motivation, have you asked students what interests them? I found that you can teach through almost any vehicle, so, if you know what they like, you can probably find materials that will grab them. My most apathetic students got excited about *Catcher in the Rye* because of the four-letter words. That's not the best rationale for literary selection, but you have to start somewhere.*

*Second, on the matter of misbehavior, can you involve the parents more? When I had problems with discipline, my most potent weapon was threatening to call home. The threat alone was usually enough because when parents found their children were causing trouble, they "grounded" them for the weekend.*

*The money issue has always been frustrating. Will the experiments with merit pay I've been reading about help you gain more recognition and financial reward? I'm biased, but I know you are the kind of teacher who would qualify.*

*Finally, let me talk about staying enthusiastic about teaching over 20 years. I didn't have the career options that you have today; still I would probably make the same choice today. I say this because when I had a good day, which was fairly often, and I could see that the kids really learned something, it was so exhilarating! I knew I was making a difference in the lives of human beings. I don't think I could feel that in an accountant's office. But, times are different, so I can see how you might reach a different conclusion.*

*Now, most importantly, what's this about not having time to take care of my grandchild properly? Just remember, now that I'm retired, I have plenty of time to baby-sit.*

*Love,*

*Mom*

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October 28, 1984

Dear Mom,

*Your letter gave me just what I needed—encouragement and food for thought. I must admit, though, I started to laugh when I read some of your suggestions. For example, finding relevant novels to read. Read? My students don't know what it's like to pick up a book and read. They just watch television or play video games. The result is they want everything to be immediate and handed to them. One day last week I gave my students an essay to write which started with an open-ended question. You should have heard them! They were upset because they couldn't find the answer in the book. When I told them it wasn't in the book, one of them asked in the most demanding tone, "Well, what are we supposed to do?" I just looked at him and said, "Well, what do you think you're supposed to do?" This kid responded, almost in shock, "You mean we have to think?" Can you believe that? And on the topic of what interests them, nothing—except Michael Jackson, and their friends. In fact, for most of my students, the main attraction of school is that it's a place where they can meet the other kids.*

*But it was your question about the parents that really got to me. The families in our school don't solve problems; they create them. We have mothers who work until they almost drop in the fields; we have mothers who are drug addicts. You can't believe what I have to do to find parents. If I actually do make contact, some say, "Why are you calling me? You should know what to do, you are the teacher!" Some of my colleagues have parents who threaten to sue them.*

*As far as merit pay goes, I hope it goes away—and soon. The competitiveness and hostility that come from one teacher in a building getting merit pay at the expense of someone else can destroy a school. What we need is across-the-board raises, and principals who have the guts to get rid of those who don't deserve to teach.*

*Unfortunately, my principal only thinks about keeping central office happy with higher test scores.*

*Now that I have dismissed all of your suggestions, you're probably wondering what I found helpful. It was what you said about good days. I started thinking about good days I've had. The first thing that came to mind was the mythology unit with my "skills" class. My colleagues in the department couldn't believe I would attempt it. One actually said, "Are you crazy, trying to teach mythology to these kids? They can't even write their own names." Well, they may not be able to write, but they're very imaginative kids, and this unit gave them an outlet for their creativity. They loved learning about the gods and goddesses and what they stood for. At the end, they created their own myths, and some were extraordinary. The best one, written by a black student, was a myth about why black people are black. It was incredible! Some of my students are very artistic, and I displayed their illustrations on the bulletin board. I was so proud of them, and, more importantly, they were proud of themselves. When I showed some of my doubting colleagues what my students had done, they were amazed. But when I offered to work with them in their classrooms to do something similar, I received the cold shoulder. It's really a shame that we all live and work in such separate worlds.*

*Another good day I recalled started as a disaster. Two kids got into a fist fight, with a lot of M-F this and M-F that. As I was trying to break them up, a third student got so incensed at their swearing that he yelled, "You don't talk like that in front of my teacher!" Then he jumped on the pile, so I had three kids rolling around on the floor. Later, when the fight was over, I realized how great it felt to have one of my students trying to protect me.*

*Lately, good days like these seem harder to come by. Still, just thinking about them made me smile. I've been trying to figure out what I could do to make more good days in the classroom. I've also been wondering what a good day is like for an accountant. It's hard to imagine. Maybe if I focus on generating more good days with*

*students, I can, at least, make it through my tenth year.  
After that, who knows? I love you!*

*Karen*

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### *Change and Stability in Teaching over Two Decades*

Karen is one of the seventy-three teachers we engaged in lengthy interviews.<sup>1</sup> Her views and experiences are, in a number of important ways, representative of the larger interview sample. Karen also exemplifies much of what our nation desires from its teachers—intelligence, energy, caring, creativity, a sense of mission. Yet she is frustrated and in agony—almost to the point of quitting.

Teaching is in Karen's bones. She literally works day and night to be a good teacher, and she loves what she does. She feels tremendous satisfaction when her efforts result in student learning. But she feels success is increasingly difficult to achieve. Moreover, when she is successful, it is at great personal cost in terms of time, energy, and emotion.

Karen relates the causes for her frustration to dramatic changes that have occurred since she was a student, since her mother was a teacher, and even since she started her own teaching career. She describes changes in students and parents, changes in the controls exerted upon teachers, and changes in the public's respect for teachers. Her sentiments foreshadow the more general view expressed in varying ways by members of our sample: *teaching today is more difficult and less rewarding than it has been in the past.*

While Karen pinpoints with clarity the changes that have caused her problems, we contend that she fails to recognize another significant but less visible source of her frustration: the forces for stability. She does not appear to see how some of the long-standing school and occupational structures and norms constrain her ability to respond effectively to new situations. For example, while the 1-to-30 teacher-student ratio provokes the complaint that she is the only peacemaker among thirty warring countries, she does not attribute her "order" problems to the large number of students crowded together in a small space. Secondary schools



have been organized with this ratio for so long that Karen accepts it as a "given" of school life. Her mother's reference to grading 150 essays suggests her acceptance as well. Karen and her mother are not unusual. For most teachers, structural stability is difficult to see. In fact, some have called the organizational structure of schooling the "world of the more or less invisible" because those who work in schools are so acculturated into the givens that they no longer notice them (Cohn, Kottkamp & Provenzo, 1987; Owens, 1988).

Karen is caught between the challenges of highly visible manifestations of change—different students, parents, and accountability mechanisms—and the nearly invisible constraints of a stable school and occupational structure created for a former time and population. She is expected to confront the realities of moving into the twenty-first century within a school structure designed for the nineteenth century and within an occupational structure that perpetuates a conservative outlook. The pressure to incorporate unsettling changes into existing structures and norms, and the realization that the effort it takes is undervalued has made her consider leaving the only career she ever wanted.

Karen's personal agony introduces the central theme of our work. This book examines how dynamic forces of social change have collided with long-standing forces for stability in the organization of schools and the occupation of teaching and how teachers are absorbing the shocks of this collision. In some instances, teachers have reacted with amazing similarity; in other instances, the impact has been more varied. In most cases, however, the collision of change and stability has not resulted in fiery explosions but in smoldering accommodations. Schools, classrooms, and teachers today look remarkably similar to the way they looked in the past; yet there are fundamental differences that make teaching more difficult and less rewarding than it used to be.

Our vehicle for examining the forces of change and stability is the voices of teachers as they describe their work at two different periods in recent educational history. Our research took as its point of departure Dan C. Lortie's *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (1975). His study of the "ethos" of the occupation—"the pattern of orientations and sentiments which is peculiar to teachers and which distinguishes them from members of other occupations" (p.viii)—grounded in his 1964 data is the baseline for our 1984 study. Using Lortie for historical perspective and context enables us to describe what it is like to teach today as compared to two decades ago, and to analyze how societal changes and school

reform efforts of today are inextricably linked to and blocked by structures of the past.

In the sections that follow, we elaborate upon the concepts of change and stability and the ways we will use them as frameworks to hear and interpret the voices of teachers today. Our elaboration includes an overview of some of the dynamic changes that have rocked American society and its schools over the past two decades, as well as some of the structures in school organization and the occupation of teaching that have remained stable for over a century.

### *Societal Changes Affecting the Schools*

The particular changes that Karen describes in her letters can be closely coupled to major changes in the larger society. Among the social changes that buffeted our nation between 1964 and 1984 were the Civil Rights Movement and Viet Nam War and the responses they inspired; demographic changes within the country, and immigration; opportunities and consciousness-raising brought about by the Women's Movement and the subsequent increase in women working outside the home and in non-traditional occupations; changes in family structure and a rise in the divorce rate; saturation of public consciousness by the media; scientific and technological advances; increasing use of illegal drugs; and shifting values involving sexual behavior and preferences, marriage, and childrearing. Such changes had far-reaching effects on almost every facet of our society, including schools and teachers.

Although most teachers probably have had to contend in one way or another with each of these changes, some of these apparently have had more classroom impact than others. For example, teachers reported that changes in the traditional family structure have had an exceptionally powerful effect on the schools. Between 1965 and 1984 the divorce rate in our country more than doubled, with the numbers increasing from 479,000 to 1,169,000 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1991, p. 86). From 1970 to 1984, the number of children involved in divorce proceedings in the given year grew from 870,000 to 1,081,000 (p. 88). By 1980, one-fifth (12 million children) of the school population were living in single-parent homes.

Children living in two-parent American families have also experienced significant changes. The increase in working mothers has meant that many children of "intact" families spend less time with

parents and have less parental supervision. Duke (1984) argued that living in homes of either divorced parents or two working parents can negatively affect student behavior at school. Students with divorced parents may be less likely to have models of successful resolution of interpersonal difficulties; students of two working parents may exhibit a greater degree of independence but less inclination to conform to school rules, teacher expectations, and close supervision. Karen's frustration with parents who create rather than solve problems refers to some of these problems.

Changes associated with the Women's Movement have had serious implications for education. In addition to the fact that more women work outside the home than in the past, the broadening of work possibilities for women has meant that both potential and practicing teachers have options that garner higher status and higher pay (Carter, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1984). Karen's consideration of a career in accounting or law in 1984 demonstrates a major shift from 1964, when the majority of college-educated women had only a choice between the "feminized" occupations of nursing and teaching.

Changes related to U.S. immigration and demographics have also dramatically affected schools by creating almost entirely new work contexts. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the student population in schools increased greatly; with the increase in numbers came an increase in the proportion of minority students. Moreover, since the early 1960s, many minority students entering school have not been fluent in English. In addition to language barriers, a host of new challenges have arisen from the dynamic created by a predominantly white, middle-class teaching force facing a growing proportion of minority students, many of whom are of a lower socio-economic background. One such new challenge is that of socializing these students into the school culture while preserving their native culture (Berlak & Berlak, 1981; Duke, 1984). For Karen, the changing school population meant spending weeks of instructional time on getting three different groups, Blacks, "red-neck" whites, and Mexican immigrants to work together within the confines of a single classroom.

While the effects of many cultural changes, such as those in family structure, enter schools directly through the children, others affect schools as policies, laws, or court decisions. In these cases such changes often involve conflicts that are ultimately resolved through the democratic political process at the federal, state, or local level by Congress, state legislatures, school boards, or the courts.

For example, schools and classrooms house a different mix of students since the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act in 1964, which brought about a new, legally backed emphasis on providing equal opportunity to all citizens. In an attempt to achieve equity, many school systems began desegregation programs, which included busing of students and transferring of faculty to obtain more racial balance. Moreover, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 led to massive federally initiated and supported programs for disadvantaged youth, including Headstart, bilingual programs, and special education classrooms for students with mental, physical, or behavioral disabilities. The passage of Public Law (PL) 94-142 in 1975 initiated the mainstreaming of most special education students into the regular classroom for at least some part of the school day.

During the late 1960s, as federal programs for disadvantaged youth were being created, the Viet Nam War became another force for change in schools (Tyack, 1990). Student protests on college campuses over the war and over the rigidity of academic requirements, and the writings of "romantic" educators Dennison (1969), Kohl (1967), and Kozol (1967) stimulated efforts to "free the children" and loosen the structure of schooling at every level. "Open" schools and universities, "alternative schools," schools within schools, and "schools without walls" multiplied. The movement toward alternative systems was, however, a short-lived phenomenon, and by the 1970s the country was moving "Back to Basics" and developing accountability measures to "control the children and their teachers" (Wirth, 1983).

The accountability emphasis, which grew out of an interest in maintaining standards along with equity, pressed schools to demonstrate through scores on standardized tests, that all students were acquiring minimum basic skills. These pressures were generated largely through a far-reaching shift in legislative policy-making at the state level and implemented through the central offices of school districts.<sup>2</sup> Although the "reserved powers" clause of the federal Constitution leaves to individual states power over organization and control of public education, the majority of states, until recently, delegated to local school boards most decisions controlling the daily operation of public schools (Tyack, 1990). The degree of autonomy generally accorded to teachers for instructional decision-making, therefore, typically fell within the purview of the local school board. But as Lortie (1969, 1975) pointed out, it was always informally rather than legally grounded, and could be quickly and almost totally withdrawn in times of crisis.

Between 1964 and 1984, states began to reclaim for their central executive and legislative bodies significant portions of the latitude historically delegated to local school boards. Centralization of educational decision-making, which continues today, has come at the expense not only of school boards, but of administrators and teachers who were once in a better position to influence policies that they had to implement (Tyack, 1990; Wise, 1988). With state centralization, important educational decisions have increasingly been rendered by people geographically and experientially removed from specific information about the classrooms and schools they intend to affect (Chubb, 1988).

This increase in state control was coupled with and reinforced by recurrence of an ideology of reform built around the metaphor of the machine for organizations and workers. The ideology has roots in Taylor's "scientific management," an efficiency orientation popular during the period of public school institutionalization in cities (Callahan, 1962). In the late 1960s this ideology resurfaced through evaluation mandates attached to federal legislation for social change. These evaluation procedures were based on Pentagon-inspired input-output systems in relation to cost-benefit analyses (Wirth, 1983).

Wise (1979) demonstrated how this technocratic ideology exerted a powerful influence in the 1970s as it became interwoven with the states' efforts to exercise control over schools in order to get back to basics, create competency-based education, and try to achieve accountability. The technocratic ideology relies on prescribed formal rules and techniques of scientific management to increase efficiency. However, since cause-and-effect relationships between educational input and output are uncertain in some instances and nonexistent in others, such means often fail. These failures have encouraged legislators and bureaucrats to impose "new" and "improved"—but essentially similar—prescriptions, and so the process becomes self-perpetuating (Wirth, 1983; Wise, 1979).

We can see how heavy prescription manifests itself in Karen's classroom as she feels pressured to focus almost exclusively on the acquisition of basic skills through workbook practice so that her students score well on standardized tests. Her complaint about writing long and detailed lesson plans is another example of the more general effort to make teachers more accountable. Moreover, as a nine-year veteran who feels relatively successful in reaching lower-track students, Karen is still expected to produce the same types of plans that novices or failing teachers are required to do.

The immense social change of the last two decades has pushed

its way into schools and classrooms with a pervasiveness that most teachers cannot escape. Facing different students who are less willing to accept the traditional curriculum, teachers often find themselves with lessons, activities, and methods that simply don't work any more. At the same time, the different lifestyles of today's parents make them less available or less willing to support teachers. New accountability policies and practices have dramatically altered what teachers are expected to do and how they are expected to do it. Teachers saw these changes; teachers felt these changes; teachers talked about these changes at length in our interviews with them.

### *Stability in School and Occupational Structures*

While teachers continually emphasized the impact of change on their lives, it soon became apparent that these highly visible changes had to be considered in the context of stability—an almost unshakable and invisible stability of the organizational structures of American schools and of the ethos of the occupation into which they had been socialized. The changes that teachers have experienced in terms of students, parents, and accountability have not been met with corresponding changes in the way schools are organized, teachers teach, or teachers are prepared. To the contrary, the challenges of change have been exacerbated by equally potent forces for stability which significantly constrain teachers' ability to respond.<sup>5</sup>

Teachers, however, did not speak directly or explicitly of problems caused by stability. They did not blame their difficulties on an inflexible school organizational pattern developed over a century ago, on long-standing occupational norms of isolation and privacy, or on unchanging teacher education programs, all of which foster constancy rather than innovation in the classroom. The structure of schools and the norms of the occupation have become so familiar that it is not easy for teachers to recognize how much these shape classroom activities. Still, as teachers talked about problems associated with change, their specific examples often made it clear that their capacity to work successfully with a different student population was hindered or blocked by stable features within the school organization or the "culture of teaching" (Cuban, 1984). We turn now to examine some of the components and forces for stability that interact with change in potent—if less obvious—ways to make teaching more difficult and less rewarding than it has been in the past.

### *School Structure as a Force for Stability*

The stability of American schools results from their structure, or what Willower (1990, p. 1) called the "organizational characteristics of public schools."<sup>4</sup> Physically, schools are composed of classrooms—small, cellular, isolated structures—containing one teacher and many students engaged in a variety of activities not easily observable by others. Each classroom is the domain of a college-trained, state-certified teacher who has multiple curricular goals to achieve. Student attendance in classrooms is mandatory, which means that teachers often face students who have an agenda that is different from the curricular goals of the teacher, and who, in fact, would rather be elsewhere.

Politically, public schools are officially governed by local boards of education, usually elected and therefore vulnerable to pressures and interventions from various constituencies, including parent organizations and teachers' unions. Because teachers and school administrators report to superintendents who, in turn, report to boards of education, in most cases, the possibilities for change and the probabilities for stability arise from a labyrinth of political maneuvers. While both the representation of various groups on the board and the layers of a bureaucratic organization in a school district tend to be forces for stability, that is not always the case. As Smith, Dwyer, Prunty, and Kleine (1988) pointed out in their in-depth analysis of the Milford School District, events such as the annual school board elections and the hiring and firing of superintendents and principals are forces for change as well as for stability.

Political and physical organizational characteristics affect the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, students, and administrators, and give rise to a shared set of norms and expectations. Two of the strongest teacher norms involve pupil control and teacher autonomy. Pupil control issues arise in large part from the involuntary nature of the student experience and the large number of students crowded into the small space of the classroom. An example of a pupil control norm is "Don't Smile until Christmas," which suggests that teachers have to establish strong behavioral control before they are able to teach (Ryan, 1970). Teacher autonomy arises from the fact that teachers are certified authority figures who have responsibility for their own separate classrooms. Because instruction is always an interactive endeavor and student responses can seldom be fully known when lessons are planned, teachers desire wide-ranging discretionary latitude within the classroom to make on-line decisions (Dreeben, 1973). One result of the autonomy

norm is the reluctance of teachers to intervene in or evaluate the activities of their colleagues. Karen's offer to help colleagues develop a mythology unit and their lack of interest in working with her could have a number of meanings, one of which might be their unwillingness to have her involved in their classrooms. It could signal their general discomfort with breaking the norms of well-defined classroom boundaries and teacher privacy and autonomy. Connected to pupil control and teacher autonomy is the matter of time as a highly valued resource. Because of the large numbers of students and activities that teachers have to handle by themselves, they seldom have enough time to accomplish their goals. Karen comments that paperwork expectations reduce her time for the substance of teaching.

Student norms and values are quite different, and often in opposition to those of teachers. Secondary students, for example, tend to develop strong peer groups, many of which center on nonacademic pursuits instead of the academic goals of their teachers. Karen's complaints about students' lack of interest in academics and her view that they see school primarily as a place for being with friends illustrate well the "involuntary client" phenomenon.

School administrators usually take on the role of organizational protectors and conservators (Lortie, 1988). It is their responsibility to be sensitive to various interest groups and to keep the community and their district supervisors reasonably happy with the operations and outcomes of the school. On a daily basis, they are overloaded with multiple responsibilities; thus their day is often fragmented, given to the solution of immediate crises that arise with students, parents, teachers, and the physical plant. Because of work overload, the norm of teacher autonomy, and the absence of agreed-upon criteria for teacher effectiveness, administrators have historically supervised teachers with "a light touch" (Willower, 1990, p. 3). Time constraints plus lack of confidence on the part of high school administrators to judge effective teaching in different subject areas might account for the failure of Karen's administrators to provide useful feedback on her lesson plans. These same factors might also account for the fact that even though she has stopped submitting plans, there appear to be no repercussions. Nonetheless, Karen feels continual pressure from her principal to "cover" district objectives and basic skills for the competency tests. It is highly likely that the pressure levied on Karen and her other colleagues by her principal is, at least in part, related to his need to please the central office administration, the Board of Education,



parents, and even the state department of education that monitors and compares districts on the basis of student outcomes.

Despite their complexity, public schools and their organizational arrangements have remained essentially stable because their various interwoven structural elements and the norms they engender are mutually reinforcing. While few individuals in these organizations consciously intend to maintain the organizational status quo—and while the organization *qua* organization certainly can have no “intention” to do so—the various components of the structure and norms work together to create an orderly and consistent environment, one not disposed toward change. Thus, while schools are action-oriented and potentially unpredictable places, many of the commonplace roles, routines, and rules can be understood in terms of the contributions they make to creating controlled and predictable organizations.

To the constituent components of organizational structure, we add one last conception—system. “System” as we use it is a greater abstraction than “organizational structure” and encompasses it. Sarason provided the following definition:

One can see, touch, and interact with people and things, but not with the abstraction we call a system. System is a concept we create to enable us to indicate that in order to understand a part we have to study it in relation to other parts. It would be more correct to say that when we use the concept *system* it refers to the existence of parts, that those parts stand in diverse relationships to each other, and that between and among those parts are boundaries (another abstraction) of varying strength and permeability. Between system and surround are also boundaries, and trying to change any part of the system requires knowledge and understanding of how parts are interrelated. (1990, p. 15)

The concept of system further illuminates why change is difficult to bring about in an organization. School organization is a system. Every part is connected to every other part in ways that are almost invisible, and it is this set of relationships that give a school its own existence and stability. The connections force us to deal with all of the parts when we desire to change a single part; but, because these connections are almost impossible to see, we generally fail to consider them in reform proposals.

Stinchcomb (1965) argued that organizations continue to reflect the social and historical circumstances of the time in which they

became institutionalized long after these circumstances have changed. The organizational characteristics of the current school structure are remarkably similar to those of schools built a hundred years ago. A similar statement can be made for the structure of teaching. We look now more closely at the ethos and stability of the occupation as described by Lortie (1975).

### *Occupation Structure as a Force for Stability*

In characterizing the ethos of teaching in the United States, Lortie maintained that it emanates from a special pattern of orientations and sentiments that, in turn, "derives both from the structure of the occupation and the meanings teachers attach to their work" (1975, p. viii). Orientations spring from the occupation's external structural aspects, especially those structures that perpetuate the occupation: recruitment, socialization, and the distribution of career rewards. Sentiments include preoccupations (attention given to some aspects of the environment but not others), beliefs (implicit and explicit theories to explain events considered important), and preferences (choices for one way of working rather than another). Sentiments derive from the tasks of the work, are internalized, and are emotion-laden (Lortie, p. 162). Lortie argued that the particular orientations and sentiments in teaching engendered conservatism, individualism, and a focus on the present among teachers.

Lortie (1975) also demonstrated how the current structure of teaching reflects its institutionalized origins in the developing urban schools of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In that era, teaching was low-status work plied mostly by under-educated, single young women who after a few years left the occupation to marry; high turnover of teachers was one result. Further, salaries of teachers were established within the larger societal pecking order of remuneration at a time when women lacked authority and when "women's work" lacked any type of pay equity. Salary levels and social status tend to become relatively fixed in relation to other occupations and their comparative rank is difficult to change.

Today, the occupation of teaching is still "women's work" (the current ratio is two to one) and still offers low pay and low status relative to other occupations that involve similar preparation and responsibilities. Although Karen sounds like a highly dedicated teacher, she still complains that her salary is nowhere commensurate with her workload and that the negative response that she gets socially when she announces she is a teacher is "depressing."

Lortie argued that the stability, or what he called "the tilt toward structural continuity" (1975, p. 21), in teaching stems, in large part, from the ways in which teachers are recruited and socialized into the occupation and rewarded for their efforts. On the issue of recruitment, his study revealed that teachers identify as attractions to teaching the opportunity to (1) work with young people, (2) be of service, (3) stay in school, (4) acquire material benefits (5) have a schedule with time flexibility. He also noted that entry is relatively easy due to highly accessible training, low admission standards, "the wide decision range" (for deciding early or late in life to teach), and a permissive "subjective warrant" (to decide that one is suited for teaching). Moreover, these attractors tend to produce teachers who value the status quo. Those who enter because they like school or the flexible schedule that is conducive to child-care are unlikely to invest time to change the organization. Karen's comments about how she loved school and always did her homework probably reflect a generally positive attitude toward schools as they have been. The problems she confronts are therefore cast in terms of the children who don't fit in, rather than in terms of a school organization that needs restructuring for today's youth. The chances of her becoming a change agent seem unlikely, particularly as she thinks about taking on the added role of motherhood.

In the domain of socialization, Lortie maintained that although prospective teachers are required to have a certain amount of formal preparation, they are not expected to complete a highly demanding program. All teachers must have at least a college degree, and their formal schooling includes both general and special schooling. One unique feature of the general schooling of teachers is that it actually functions in Lortie's terms as an "apprenticeship of observation," in that those who become teachers have, as students, already had at least sixteen continuous years of contact with teachers (1975, p. 61). This apprenticeship encourages the observers to internalize traditional patterns and leads to a widely accepted belief that "we teach as we were taught" (Kennedy, 1991; Porter, 1982). The special schooling, moreover, is relatively short and is "neither intellectually nor organizationally as complex as that found in the established professions" (Lortie, 1975, p. 58). It includes a "mini-apprenticeship" in the form of student teaching, which can be as short as six to eight weeks, and which is highly dependent for its quality on the skill of the supervising classroom teacher. Once hired, a beginning teacher is given the same full load of responsibilities that experienced teachers have and is expected to "learn while doing." The novice typically seeks advice

from more experienced colleagues but is disposed to accept or reject suggestions largely on personal grounds. The criteria for acceptance appear to be that they fit one's situation or style and that they "work."

This process of socialization leads, in Lortie's words to an "emergence and reinforcement of idiosyncratic experience and personal synthesis" and to an absence of a "common technical culture" (1975, pp. 79-80). The inability to draw on an accepted body of knowledge in turn affects status and contributes to the individualistic and conservative outlooks of the occupation. Teachers do not feel confident to speak as a group or to respond to the demands of others from an authoritative knowledge base. Further, the overall weakness and brevity of the formal socialization simply cannot counteract the tendencies to absorb and use the ideas and approaches of one's prior personal experience. Thus the occupational structure and its stability link up with the institutional structure and stability as individual teachers selectively and privately continue to employ the models from their past or from their colleagues behind closed classroom doors.

Karen once again illustrates the point. While she doesn't speak about her teacher education in her letters to her mother, she does comment extensively in her interviews on the negative aspects of her preparation for the classroom. One major frustration was the fact that she did not have any extended field experience until she entered student teaching. In her words:

For three and a half years, I had no idea what it was really like to be a teacher. I "aced" every education course I took, but I didn't know what it was like to be a teacher.

What was even more disturbing was that once she got into her student teaching placement, she had a very unsatisfactory experience with her supervising teacher. Her recollections went this way:

She was a drill sergeant, and she was very, very structured, very methodical, very sarcastic. . . . She was such a tyrant. . . . The best days that I had were when she left me alone, and I developed a very close relationship with the kids, and she really resented that because they didn't warm up to her because she would not allow them to, and I'm not talking about being buddies, I'm talking about being people. . . . She was very, very sarcastic and very cold to them. . . . I enjoyed the days that I was able to do what I