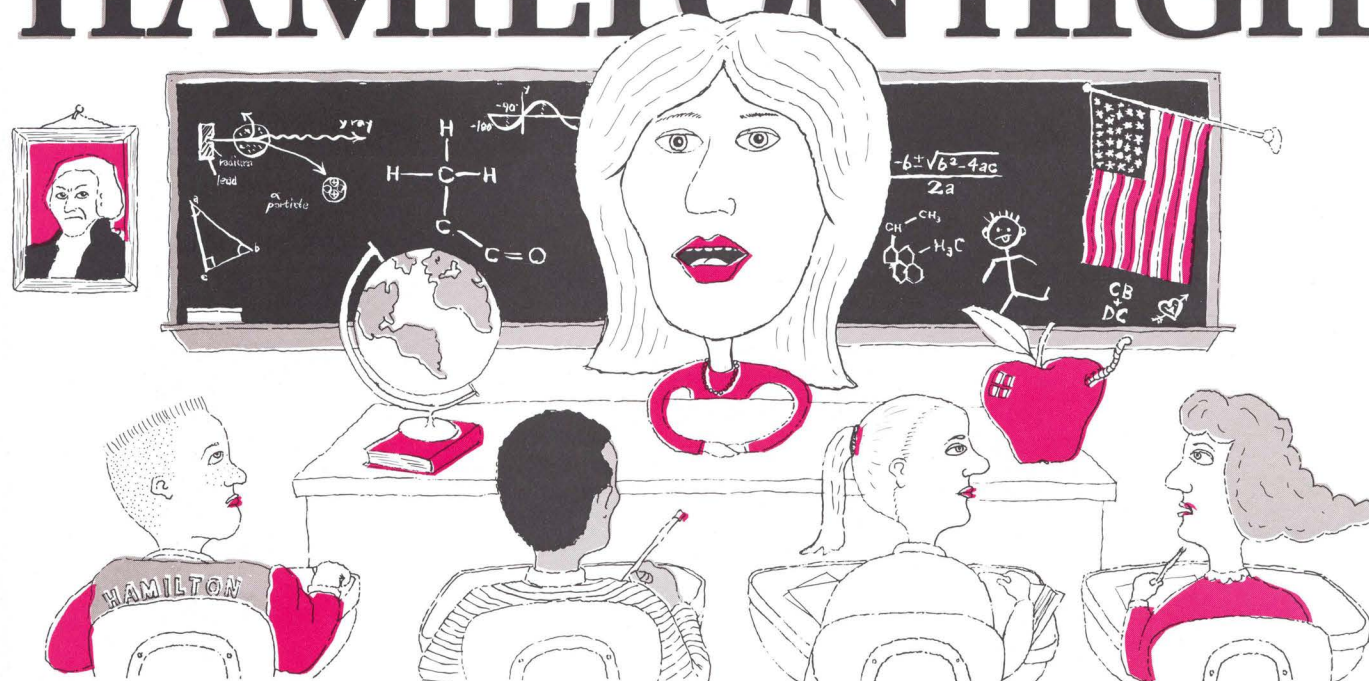


The World We Created at HAMILTON HIGH



TEACHING HAS NEVER BEEN easy. Individuals of extraordinary talent have been crushed in the schoolroom. D. H. Lawrence, who taught seventh and eighth graders, found that school was "mean and miserable—and I hate conflict. I was never born to command. . . . Think of a quivering greyhound sent to mind a herd of pigs and you see my teaching."

No doubt Lawrence left teaching for some of the same reasons that teachers have always quit. The stresses associated with teaching reside in the task: to establish the minimum order necessary so that education may take place, to gain the trust of pupils, to motivate and engage the students with the subject in ways that ensure that they will learn.

The teacher's voice is seldom heard in contemporary debates about educational reform, and the ethos of the public school—its collective psychology—is only vaguely understood. Early in this decade, I undertook a study to understand what shapes the ethos of a school. In the initial stage of the research, my colleagues and I visited 33 public and private schools. Later we conducted year-long observations in five schools, and in the end I focused on a single school, renamed here Hamilton High—a racially, ethnically, and economically integrated school, located in a mid-sized Northeastern city. Hamilton High had been born amid the self-confident spirit of pre-Sputnik America, and underwent a series of fundamental changes in later decades. It served as a microcosm to

IF WE ARE TO IMPROVE
PUBLIC SECONDARY
EDUCATION, WE MUST
UNDERSTAND THE
HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS
THAT COME INTO PLAY—
IN THE CLASSROOMS,
AROUND THE COFFEE
MACHINE, INSIDE THE
PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE.



BY GERALD GRANT

Gerald Grant is a professor of cultural foundations of education and sociology at SU. This article is adapted from his book, The World We Created at Hamilton High, published in 1988 by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138 (278 pp., \$24.95). © Harvard College.

understand educational change in postwar America.

I supplemented the usual sources—yearbooks, newspapers, pupil records, and school board minutes—with first-hand, inside accounts. I trained students in methods of social observation and encouraged teachers to share their dilemmas with me. In 1984-85, I taught in the school, and later worked with teachers to see what use they might make of the research.

In classroom observations, in interviews, and—most revealingly—in the diaries that a few conscientious teachers kept for us at Hamilton High and elsewhere, certain conflicts and dissatisfactions emerged as universal themes of teaching. Our understanding of these themes, in teachers' own terms, is crucial to meaningful reform.

THE NETWORK OF DEMAND

TEACHERS OFTEN FEEL OVERwhelmed by the emotional demands and needs of children, as revealed by this excerpt from a teacher's diary:

Back to school after two snow days—good to be back although I have a slight flu. Mary looking wan from weeks of strep and family turmoil. Ralph, with bad cough and sore throat and looking feverish, pulled me close to him and said they'd won the custody case I testified in last week. Althea, full of anxious chatter about their moving date in three

weeks. Frannie and Carol both on medication which requires reminders to be taken periodically. Chris brings friend who speaks no English to visit for the day. Fei's mother weeps from homesickness for Taiwan. All this while taking attendance and collecting lunch money between 8:35 and 8:45 a.m.

An almost constant theme is the guilt teachers feel over their failure to meet the intellectual needs of all children. Diaries are filled with references to teachers being brought up short by students they know they failed to serve or to reach.

Teachers in their private musings are also torn with conflicts between the way they would prefer to teach and the demands of prescribed curricula. An experienced teacher put her lesson plan aside after she walked into class one morning to find that a boy's dry-cell battery had overflowed during the night and spilled acid on his desk. The class spent the morning researching the topic to find out what could have caused this accident, how dangerous the acid might be, what words such as *corrosive* mean, and so on. Students went to the library, called parents, consulted science texts.

This particular teacher preferred to teach this way, but in her diary she worried that she might have "wasted" a day that should have been spent preparing slower children in the class for competency tests. "How do you assure that all kids get their skills taught in all areas?"

Teaching is often lonely, repetitive work in which a teacher is incessantly asked to give and ends the day emotionally drained. The balance between getting and giving has grown more disproportionate in recent decades. Expectations, complaints, even lawsuits have multiplied, while rewards have diminished. Responsibilities have increased as authority has weakened. Understanding those transformations in authority emerged as the key to explaining what happened at Hamilton High.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

IN LARGE MEASURE, AUTHORITY is personally earned. The authority of an individual teacher depends on his or her subject-matter competence, as well as his or her moral sensibilities. Teachers may undercut their own authority, for example, as they reveal their moral qualities or lack of them in hundreds of telling ways each day.

Other students in a class held in a high school library could hear as clearly as we did the student who cursed another as a "stupid fat bitch," while the teacher went on as though nothing had happened. Teachers who do not respond, who do not listen, who fail to prepare themselves responsibly for the day's work, reveal that they do not care and that they do not fully respect their students. Pupils will give them little

Teaching is often lonely, repetitive work in which a teacher is incessantly asked to give and ends the day emotionally drained. The balance between getting and giving has grown more disproportionate in recent decades.



allegiance.

At Hamilton High, after a particularly difficult task, a chemistry teacher explained her philosophy:

I give the kids assignments well in advance. I don't give them busy work. I make it very clear that what they do really is significant—it is necessary for them in terms of understanding the next page or concept and if they don't do it, then it is detrimental for them. I don't play games with my students, so I don't expect them to play games with me either. Science, in itself, means some kind of discipline.

Other teachers communicate quite different expectations by overlooking cheating, habitually arriving late for class, or failing to return papers that were necessary for understanding the next concept. The differences in the personal qualities and character of teachers are evident to anyone who has visited schools.

But authority is socially conferred also. It derives, for example, from the esteem accorded by the community to the role. Teachers have never been near the top in any ranking with other professions such as medicine or law, although recent salary increases (up to nearly \$60,000 in Syracuse and \$70,000 in nearby Rochester) and other efforts at reform are changing the image of the teaching profession today.

Social authority is derived from the teacher's role as a moral agent representing the community. In recent decades, however, teachers found it difficult to define the source of their moral authority. They could no longer depend on a community consensus. In the 1970s many teachers came to believe that neither the law nor the parents were behind them. Teachers often thought the law reflected distrust of their judgment or intentions, and was a weapon for disciplining them rather than their students. Where the law once upheld teachers' right to exercise reasonable corporal punishment, they could now be threatened with a suit for child abuse or with dismissal.

Federal educational policy, mandated both in new law and through the courts in order to overcome unjust situations, imposed a new moral order on the schools. At Hamilton High and elsewhere, it resulted in the breakup of the old world based on local traditions and unwritten consensus. Attitudes within the school and community changed slowly with gradual changes of consciousness, and with apprehensive living through unfamiliar conditions.

The law is a teacher. But for the most part the new laws were laid down in public schools in the absence of any internal guiding vision or positive ethos. The paradox is that at the same time that a new and more just moral order was being created with respect to large societal goals, the moral order within the school grew weaker in other respects: absenteeism rose, cheating was widespread, drug use became more common, fighting and backtalk increased.

The two phenomena are related in complex ways in the history of Hamilton High. Social revolutions that swept through Hamilton destroyed the old order and created doubt and confusion among the faculty and staff about the exercise of both their intellectual and moral authority. Teachers and school officials themselves were the object of new laws; they were indicted for their failures to create the conditions of equality of opportunity that society now demanded. They were ambivalent and demoralized. Teachers locked their doors and tried to carry on, hoping that the anger in the halls would dissipate.

Their isolation from one another further affected the ethos of the school because teacher authority is derived also from the generalized set of norms and expectations held by the faculty itself. The authority of any one teacher in the school is affected by the consensus or lack of it achieved by teachers in that setting. Can a teacher who approaches a student causing a disturbance in the hall expect to be backed up by colleagues? Do other teachers in the school assign homework regularly and expect it to be turned in the next day? Or does a laissez-faire attitude prevail?

The loss of consensus at Hamilton High in the 1970s, reflected in the faculty's splitting into three separate locations for lunch, had serious consequences for discipline. Many new teachers, at Hamilton and elsewhere, were influenced by the radical battles on campuses and were disposed to question authority. They shared to some degree the notion that competition was immoral and that hierarchies of any kind were to be avoided. They were reluctant to assume a disciplinarian role or to cooperate with other staff in maintaining the established code. At Hamilton some faculty members smoked marijuana with students, whereas others believed pot smoking to be a reportable offense.

Finally, the social authority of the teacher derives also from the general status of adults in the society. But the relative statuses of children and adults was thrown into cultural confusion, with a detrimental effect on teaching. Teachers of adolescents could no longer assume much deference on the basis of age. The 1980s brought some readjustment as the nation entered a more conservative era. Teachers breathed more easily, although those with long memories knew that the relationship between teachers and students had changed profoundly.

The effects of this loss of socially conferred authority can be devastating. In our fieldwork we found demoralized teachers sometimes engaged in a poor form of individualized teaching, letting students do what they chose with little guidance and few demands as long as they kept quiet. More common, perhaps, was the teacher who plodded wearily on, covering the material and not seeing or hearing, as

In the 1970s, many new teachers were reluctant to assume a disciplinarian role or to cooperate with other staff in maintaining the established code. Some smoked marijuana with students, whereas others believed pot smoking to be a reportable offense.



illustrated in this excerpt from a research assistant's field notes:

I went to Mr. Farr's earth science class and sat in back of the room where I found myself next to two boys who were constantly bickering with each other. Pupils kept coming in long after the bell had rung. Mr. Farr waited a while and then faced the class and said to them, "Silence, boys; quiet, boys. Today we're going to deal with metallic and non-metallic clusters. Quiet, girls. Please. Let us have some quiet now." But kids went on talking with each other, some very loud and disturbing, others more private and low-keyed. . . . The two boys sitting on my left near the window discovered a big cardboard box. One of the boys took a marker and wrote across it in large letters "Linda sucks!" Meanwhile the teacher went on trying to get the kids to notice the difference between anthracites and sulfur and to explain to them how rocks and other minerals were graded on a hardness scale from zero to ten. Somebody from the other end of the class had seen the boy taunt Linda and nudged her. Linda shouted across the classroom to the boy and said, "Stop that now! You learn to behave!" Mr. Farr continued but I was so affected by this experience that I was in no mood to visit another class.

When the social supports are undermined, teachers who do not give up are forced to draw on personal reserves. They try to win over students by the force of their personality or by offers of friendship. In this sense public schools sometimes become unwitting free schools, that is, teachers are forced to rely on forms of authority that were embraced by the radicals who formed alternative schools in the 1960s to escape what they felt was the rigid and stultifying authority of the public school. The irony is that a whole generation of reformers closely associated with those schools now lament the loss of authority. One's personal coinage is soon expended, and the theme of exhaustion is heard again and again.

TWO PROPOSALS

WE MUST RECONSTITUTE the intellectual and moral authority of teachers and principals without sacrificing the real gains in equity and fairness that have been won. Two essential reforms are central to the task: first, let the schools shape their own destiny; second, put teachers in charge of their own practice.

Most teachers and principals in public schools do not feel that they control their fate. They have lost a sense of efficacy and believe that they are on the receiving end of policies made elsewhere. Principals have become middle managers who process directives issuing from a multilayered bureaucracy. In one school a principal pointed to 45 pounds of circulars that had emanated from the central office in the previous year; in a single month 37 different topics had been covered. In surveys, a third of the prin-

cipals questioned said that the proliferation of judicial and legislative mandates has led them to think of quitting. In Hamilton High's home district, the number of central-office administrators had more than doubled since 1953 while the total pupil enrollment had declined by a third.

Three paradoxes must be resolved. The first is that the laudable effort to overcome harmful inequalities has too often led to the presumption that schools must be identical—that all differences must be extinguished on the grounds that they reflect inequalities. As one of the leading teachers at Hamilton High said early in our discussions of possible reforms, "But downtown doesn't want us to be different; they won't let us be different."

I have visited more than 200 schools. Many were admirable schools, but they differed significantly from one another. True, they shared much: safe and orderly environments, agreements about purpose, engagement in learning, fairness and decency, and a sense of shared norms and ownership. But they differed in organization, academic and moral emphasis, local traditions, and forms of teaching. Such differences should not only be tolerated, they should be encouraged.

The second paradox is that while egalitarian reforms have restored trust with various external publics, the continuous extension of heavy-handed bureaucratic mandates has eroded the trust of teachers. This was expressed emphatically by one of the Hamilton High teachers in the midst of the faculty's nearly unanimous rejection of a new mandate that 80 percent of all pupils "will pass" a specified state-level exam. "It doesn't matter what we say; they'll shove it down our throats anyway." The mandate, unaccompanied by any enabling changes, flies in the face of pedagogical and common sense. Like others before it, it breeds cynicism. It is a Pentagon approach to education.

The third paradox is that bureaucracy replaces leaders who exercise discretion with specialists who interpret rules. Nowhere is this more true than in the conversion of principals into middle-management functionaries. The requirements of the job increasingly become bureaucratic aptitude—mastering the maze and demonstrating the political, managerial, and legal skills required. Being an outstanding teacher or showing the potential for creating a good educational community are not a salient part of the dossier. Principals ought typically to come from the ranks of master teachers and to be seen by their peers as persons who have demonstrated the capacity for educational leadership.

Bureaucracy replaces leaders who exercise discretion with specialists who interpret rules. Nowhere is this more true than in the conversion of principals into middle-management functionaries.



HOW WE RAISE TEACHERS

THIS BRINGS US TO THE SECOND essential reform: put teachers in charge of their practice.

A variety of approaches to restructuring the teaching profession have been urged in the recent reform reports. The most promising lies in the concept of a career ladder. Sometimes referred to as the development of "master teachers" or "leading teachers," the key elements combine mentorship of beginners with teacher judgments about tenure and promotion. Experiments with the concept have been launched in several states.

The plans usually specify three or four stages of a teaching career. Beginning teachers serve an apprenticeship of one or two years. Professional teachers go on the usual teacher salary scale; they may remain on it for life, or after a period of years may seek appointment as senior or master teachers themselves. Promotion to these ranks carries significant increments of salary over the regular scale, and these senior teachers spend a third or a half of their time in supervisory and mentorship roles.

The career-ladder concept deserves adoption for four good reasons.

- It will attract new talent to teaching and help to retain the ablest of those already teaching.
- It will provide the means for real improvement of teaching. With the proposed two-year apprenticeships, beginning teachers would teach on reduced schedules while benefiting from the mentorship of master teachers.
- If teachers are given the kind of responsibility suggested here, the norms and overall climate in the school would be strengthened. In taking on their new role, master teachers will gain more sympathy for the problems of novices. And as they visit colleagues' classes to make assessments about their fitness for promotion and tenure, they will see the need for common policies on homework and for developing consensus about norms that affect honesty, fairness, respect, and quality of life in the school.

- The exercise of the responsibilities I have described for master teachers also fosters development of future principals.

These two essential reforms—enabling schools to shape their destiny and putting teachers in charge of their practice—bring the question of reconstituting the intellectual and moral authority of the school properly into focus. Together they would bring about a balance between the individual and social sources of authority upon which all good teaching depends and provide the basis for creating a strong positive ethos in the schools in which the future of the society will be partly formed.