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ABSTRACT

Appropriate responses to the authority problem in schools can be informed by a more complex understanding of the issue. Also of importance is knowledge of the ways in which schools and society at large are involved with both the creation of and the solution to the problem of student/teacher authority relations. School people are referring primarily to discipline problems when discussing authority. Reasons for their concern include these facts: schools need cooperative students to exist, students' academic knowledge cannot be improved without their support and confidence, and schools are a forum in which social relations are reworked. Authority in the school must be based on trust and accountability and come from persuasion, compromise, and negotiation. The erosion of a teacher's traditional authority in the school today appears to be due to slipping of the teacher's status. Data suggest that students' willingness to grant teachers personal authority is based on a combination of the teacher's respect, social skills, and technical expertise. Teachers must call on the personal capital they have accumulated to encourage compliance. When that fails, they should negotiate to find a standard with which students will comply. (YLB)

Final Report

GETTING ALONG

Negotiating Authority in High Schools

by

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INTRODUCTION

From the grim warnings of puritan preachers to the current concern about school violence, Americans have been reminded time and again that their children are a disorderly and wayward lot, and that their salvation and the good of society requires a strict, vigorously enforced code of moral and social conduct. But even as they were urged to curb that rebellious spirit, Americans were enjoined to free the creative potential of their youth. With future generations heralded as the nation's greatest resource for economic and social progress, parents and teachers were to nurture their children's natural talents and abilities. Freeing the spirit while restraining it has been the major guideline for raising American youth.

This is a mixed message of guidance, but one that is firmly embedded in the ideology of public education. The message can be found in the language of discourse that surrounded every major school reform from the beginning of common schools to the rise of vocational training. It was echoed by those favoring compulsory schooling as well as by a generation of Progressives. From time to time, the emphasis has shifted: when thousands of immigrant children poured into the nation's schools and seemingly threatened disruption with alien ways and objectionable habits, control was considered the critical task. And half a dozen decades later, when the race to the moon got under way, schools became bent on stimulating creativity. New curricula and teacher training programs proposed to teach youth to challenge and to question, and to free them from the restraints of conventional thought.

To judge from recent reports, the efforts to liberate young people have been too successful; the tension between control and freedom has snapped, leaving the schools hanging somewhere beyond freedom. A wave of social

science reports, commissioned studies, and surveys suggests that America's young have precipitated a climate of chaos and confusion in high schools across the country. Vandalism and violence are on the rise, assaults on teachers are rapidly escalating, and security guards have become commonplace in most urban high schools. Even in suburbia, long seen as the haven of academic excellence, the behavior of teen-agers has become a major community concern. Absenteeism and truancy are chronic problems; students attend school but don't attend classes; and the petty harrassment of teachers by students is matched only by parents' unwillingness to support the schools' efforts to enforce school rules.

Problems of violence and misbehavior are further compounded by a concern over student achievement. SAT scores have been in decline for over a decade now, and the basic reading and writing skills of students are deplorable. The academic standards of many schools are reportedly in retreat in the face of an increasingly apathetic or restive student population that would rather leave school to work than remain to study and learn. Even the schools' extracurricular activities, which James Coleman deplored as the major preoccupation of teen-agers, has fallen on hard times. Participation in school activities and sports has declined dramatically in many districts, and some report difficulty in fielding a football squad, or a band to play the Star Spangled Banner at graduation. Many students appear to have little regard for either education or their school. Rather than stretching their intellects to new heights as many had hoped, students have stretched the limits of acceptable or reasonable behavior. It would seem that America's youth are spinning out of control and taking the high schools with them.

To many this is a deeply disturbing trend that threatens the foundation of public education and portends a society of uncivilized, illiterate ruffians. Fearful of this future, educators have suggested various remedies for improving the schools, shaping up youth, and bolstering public confidence. But the remedies rest on the belief that the problems have been caused by schoolpeople in schools, are local to schools, and can therefore be solved within the schools. Proposals to crack down by tightening academic standards and requirements, or by reintroducing corporal punishment or easier expulsion, seem to suggest that the problems are rooted in a generation of undisciplined students. Proposals to eliminate tenure, or to establish rigorous performance objectives or new training and credentialing procedures for teachers, assume a generation of teachers less competent than formerly, and more interested in generous contracts than improved instruction.

But proposals to tighten the reins of authority so as to improve the schools ignore the fact that public confidence in virtually all public institutions has diminished dramatically over the past decade. The traditional authority of the courts, of federal, state, and local governing agencies, and of labor unions and big business firms has steadily eroded, along with that of the schools. Americans have new doubts about the authority of a host of institutions designed to serve them. The public's message is clear: the old faith in democratic institutions is on the wane, and the authority once vested in them is being challenged.

This paper is an effort to look at authority relations in high schools to see whether indeed there is a serious problem. It is an effort to understand, from conversations with students and teachers in public high schools around the country, how relations have changed and whether the changes seem

to interfere with learning and instruction. We wanted to know how teachers describe students' behavior in class and around the school, whether they think it has changed over the past several years, and in what ways. We also asked teachers whether students' behavior influences the academic and social life of the school, and if so, how. We asked students for their views on these questions, and for their views on their teachers. We wanted to know what students think about formal education, whether they value it, and how the feel about the education they are receiving.

Because of this, while tightening the rules may look effective, it may be deceptive. Like many medications, the remedy, if it works, does so by hiding the symptons until the body can cure itself. Though this strategy may work in both medicine and schools, it should be recognized for what it is. It does not address the core of the problem, and in regard to schools in particular, it does not tell us whether we are improving our youth, or whether the problems remain and will reappear in more virulent forms. We believe that appropriate responses to the authority problem in schools must be, and can be, informed by a more complex understanding of the issue and of the ways in which the schools and society at large are involved with both the creation of and the solution to the problem of student/teacher authority relations.

Our curiosity about these issues was stimulated by work we have carried out in high schools over the past several years. That work has left us with the impression that authority relationships in schools <u>are</u> changing, but that the changes cannot be described simply as pathologic. Furthermore, it has led us to suspect that changing views of authority in schools closely parallel those in other social institutions. Concern about increasing

violence in schools and disrespect for property may indeed be well founded, and transgressions of sufficient magnitude to require attention. But if the social and academic climate in high schools has changed so as to reflect broader social changes in the society, one might question both the wisdom and the likely success of efforts to revert to the old traditions.

AUTHORITY IN SCHOOLS

Authority means many things to schoolpeople--from the teacher's right to expect student obedience without a snicker, to the principal's right to suspend a disruptive student. It covers vandalism to class-cutting and public displays of affection. But whatever it applies to and however it is defined, schoolpeople agree that there is less of it, that their authority is eroding rapidly, that they no longer command the respect of the students, and that increasingly they are facing parents as adversaries rather than as allies.

This picture of the authority crisis implies that things were better in the past; that somehow a few years back students were more obedient and parents more appreciative (Swidler, 1979). To some extent this is correct; those that remained in schools were perhaps more obedient. But the past was also different in other ways. Students were prohibited from challenging their teachers, and were asked to leave school if they were a nuisance; many potential students were excluded, many more dropped out before high school, and many parents were less well educated than parents today.

Moreover, relations between teachers and students have never been ideal; there has always been an uneasy truce with the potential for conflict and chaos ever present. Writers and practitioners have seen this tension as an outgrowth of the conflicting goals of the schools: to provide an opportunity under compulsion; to encourage creativity while molding children to fit into

society and thus defining the bounds of their creativity; to constrain children's physical mobility while expecting them to obey voluntarily. Organizational goals and individual goals in juxtaposition often seem incompatible.

While this context may have always existed, today it appears threatening and the goals seem unattainable. Social changes of the past decade have altered and enlarged the groups that challenge the authority and expertise of the schools. No longer are the middle and working class the staunch ally of the teacher; increasingly these parents are skeptical of the education their children receive and do not encourage them to be docile. This challenge from the traditional supporters of the schools adds to the gloom.

How can we describe and evaluate the current situation? What do the authority relations between students and teachers look like, and what do they signify for schools as institutions? What in fact do people mean when they talk about authority in schools? Research suggests that schoolpeople are generally not referring to violence in their schools when discussing authority.[1] They are concerned with discipline issues that nag them daily.

Administrators in urban and suburban schools in New York and California find that skipping classes, skipping school, and tardiness are their most pressing problems; they are least troubled by fighting, profanity, and disrespect. Teachers, in contrast, report that their most widespread

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[1] Violence is a concern in some schools, and we do not intend to minimize this. However, in this paper--and as used by teachers and students in conversations--authority refers to more subtle, personal interactions.

problems are impertinence and discourtesy: "In-class rather than attendance-related problems cause teachers the most worry" (Duke, 1978, p. 326; NEA Survey, 1976). Thus the two groups see the current authority and discipline crisis from different perspectives, although both may conclude that they are powerless to act. Duke suggests that their perceptions are shaped by self-interest rather than by a view of the total school environment.

Duke concludes that

> Overall, the data present a picture of high schools that somewhat belies much of the widely publicized "crisis" in school discipline. Teachers generally handled their own student behavior problems and felt they had adequate skills in classroom management . . . . There were some indications, however, that administrators sensed that more could be done to deal effectively with student misbehavior. Teachers could enforce rules more consistently. Students might be made more aware of school rules . . . . Couple [this] with the fact that 88 out of the 143 administrators who returned the questionnaire expressed an active interest in locating in-service workshops dealing with school discipline, and there is ample reason to believe that problems are greater than the respondents indicate. (p. 328)

But how great are they? Administrators' interest is not a reliable measure: if everyone assumes that there is a serious discipline problem, then administrators are well-advised to act accordingly--for example to search for in-service workshops on discipline and school management. This would be an appropriate response to a social concern, but it would not be valid evidence that the problem is in fact more serious than schoolpeople describe. We are left with a dilemma:

> Whether, in reality, adolescents today are behaving worse than they used to behave is a question in search of an interested educational historian. In any event, parents and educators alike believe that the young have never been less mindful of authority. They have joined together in the search for solutions, while simultaneously blaming each other for the problem.
>
> (Duke & Perry, 1977, p. 1)

Why Worry About Authority?

With mounting concern about failing test scores, rising illiteracy, and grade inflation, why is authority such a volatile issue? At the school building level there are good practical reasons. If students refuse to come to classes, vandalize the school, and terrorize teachers and other students, then the school as a formal organization is in danger of collapse. Schools need cooperative students in order to exist. The schools rely on the very individuals who are threatening the system; this makes authority crucial.

Second, authority is an issue because schoolpeople believe that they cannot improve tudents' academic knowledge without the support and confidence of the students. They cannot teach if they cannot create order and if every bit of wisdom that they offer is open to challenge. They see their status in the institution as intimately tied to their success with students. Yet the conditions for creating support, confidence, and mutual respect no longer seem to be present.

This is a particularly trying situation, for teachers obtain much of their work gratification from their ability to help train responsible adults. Beyond the imparting of knowledge to students, they have an emotional stake in the longer-term effects of their work.

> Although some [teachers] stressed the desirability of independence of mind, most allusions to moral outcomes and citizenship emphasized compliance and obedience . . . . The dross of classroom management is transformed into the gold of dependable citizenship . . . . These [teachers] see it as preparing citizens for the Republic.
>
> (Lortie, 1975, p. 113)

In this formidable task, teachers see the bonds they develop between themselves and their students as a key ingredient of their success. They do not

see socialization as a curriculum topic that can be taught with planned activities or goals. This becomes clear when teachers talk about the characteristics of outstanding colleagues they have known.

> Elementary teachers tend to use . . . terms such as "students adore her" or "students love her." High school teachers . . . employ more restrained language, substituting words like "respect" and "esteem." Both . . . however, link the evocation of such positive feelings with the capacity to establish and maintain control. When they select a peer as outstanding, they make it clear that his popularity is not purchased by pandering to student wishes for an easy time.
>
> (Lortie, 1975, p. 119)

The current situation, in which students appear to be less emotionally tied to their teachers or actively reject them, strikes at the most important aspects of teachers' work.

Third, it is informative to study authority relations in schools because the schools are a forum in which social relations are reworked.

> An attack on authority in schools can therefore be seen as an attempt to rework the patterns of authority in our culture, precisely at the point where they are most in evidence and most richly elaborated.
>
> (Swidler, 1979, p. 7)

Changes in teacher/student relationships are thus a sign of changes in patterns of authority in the larger society. They appear magnified in schools because schools are charged with training children in authority relations and adult roles. When those relations are undergoing changes, it is not surprising that anxiety and confusion results.

What is Authority?

Authority is a fuzzy term. People use it to mean the ability to enforce one's decisions, or the right to do so. It is often confused with legitimacy, substituted for respect, and invoked as power. In Weber's original definition,

"authority is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (Weber, 1925, p. 152). As Spady (1974) points out:

> According to Weber, authority differs from power in two important respects: first, people comply with the requests (demands) made of them voluntarily rather than involuntarily; and second, they withhold judgment regarding the legitimacy of these demands at the time they are made . . . . In effect, the compliance of a subordinate party may appear to be virtually automatic simply because the request being made of him is congruent with values that indicate which conditions take priority in his life. Whereas persuasion is necessary in situations involving parties with discrepant values and goals, the subordinate party in an authority relationship grants legitimacy to the dominant party by virtue of the latter's embodying attributes that the former regards as valuable in promoting his general welfare. (pp. 44-45)

It is authority defined as above--the automatic, unquestioning response by the student--that is absent today. It has been replaced by a social environment that encourages challenges. While teachers might value the ability to think and challenge in some domains, they do not value it when what is being questioned is their right to determine what students will learn and how they will behave. Such challenges create uncertainty and instability, apparently threatening the very existence of the schools, and at the extreme, the continuation of society and social relations as we have known them.

As we have pointed out, threats to teachers' authority and control are not new (Waller, 1932). The power that teachers seemed to wield has always been based on a weak bond between teachers and students that may rupture at any time, no matter how secure the system seems.

> The school is a despotism . . . in a state of perilous equilibrium . . . threatened from within and exposed to

> regulation and interference from without . . . capable of being overturned in a moment, exposed to the instant loss of its stability and its prestige. It is a despotism demanded by the community of parents, but specially limited by them as to the techniques which it may use for the maintenance of a stable social order. It is a despotism resting on children, at once the most tractable and the most unstable members of the community. (p. 10)

The fact that control rests with the consent of the governed is the critical feature in contemporary discussions of the breakdown of authority. Those who lament the loss of authority are painfully aware of the weak glue that holds schools together, and frightened that the enterprise is about to disintegrate. Though they almost seem ready to settle for the power to control their students, schoolpeople would rather know how to establish authority; authority that is seen as legitimate and is respected by students and parents alike.

A critical ingredient in establishing legitimate authority is trust: trust that the person making the request has one's own interest at heart.

> [Though] many . . . have the mistaken notion that one demands respect or deference by virtue of his attributes or resources, quite the opposite is true. Legitimacy, respect, and deference are granted by the subordinate on the basis of the dominant party, in his eyes, having earned them . . . the power to grant authority lies with the students!
>
> (Spady, 1974, p. 46)

Schools, however, lack any substantial way to convince students that teachers' actions and demands are in their best interests. Rewards--a better job, a college education, the joy of reading--all lie in the distant future. What is more, schools face the difficulty of creating trust in the context of compulsion.

> . . . the school's most challenging task is to establish a set of social control mechanisms through which the involuntary and coercive aspects of the custody-control function would appear to be minimized.
>
> (Spady, 1974, p. 39)

McDermott (1977) too sees the relationship between students and schools as essentially coercive, with authority and legitimacy dependent on the perceptions of the students. He regards trust and accountability as unstable, and as always on-the-spot accomplishments.

> Teaching is invariably a form of coercion. "Instruction is the occasion for adults to exercise their preference for making sense of the world for the child" (McKay, 1973). Some teachers handle coercion directly; others are more guidance oriented . . . . The issue is not so much how a child is coerced, but whether the teacher is able to communicate that the child can trust the teacher's coercion to be in the child's best interest . . . . Less direct forms of coercing children into attending to classroom tasks are uniformly no better or worse than the authoritarian approach. Without a proper relational foundation, a child is no more likely to follow a gentle suggestion than a direct order. (pp. 156-159)

When the foundation of trust and accountability is missing, it is difficult to have order, teaching, and learning.

From these descriptions of legitimate authority and the negotiated nature of that authority, it would seem that control in the schools must come from persuasion, compromise, and negotiation. Since teachers may be able to force students to sit in a classroom for 45 minutes but are unable to force them to learn, coercion and power alone will be ineffective. For some school goals, schools must enlist students' participation in maintaining the organization and accomplishing individual learning tasks. Thus, it would seem that in the present climate persuasion is the main tool left to schoolpeople.

> From the perspective of many students and social critics, persuasion should be the only mechanism of control used in schools because it . . . neutralizes many of the inherent status differences between staff and students, opens the conditions of school life to negotiation and change, and assures the voluntary participation of students in learning activities. However, it is precisely

> this inherently unstable feature of continual negotiation . . . that many staff, school board members, and parents find so problematic . . . . In terms of rational planning and efficiency in school operations, an excessive reliance on persuasion can lead to a lack of predictability, confusion and wasted resources. (pp. 44-45)

And, of course, persuasion may fail, leaving teachers and administrators no legitimate way to enforce their wishes.

The Nature of the Dilemma

Teachers are gratified when they form personal bonds with students. Their need for visible control diminishes, their work rewards increase, and from what we know, students and administrators are happier as well. In a job in which the techniques are uncertain and the goals distant, warm, personal relations can ease the anxiety and ambiguity that accompany teaching and learning. But there is a problem built into teachers' preferences for these kinds of relationships. Personal relations intrinsically involve elements of negotiation, compromise, and uncertainty; often teachers see negotiation and compromise as evidence of the loss of their authority. Further, personal authority can wane or can fail to develop in these relations. This leads to an instability in the teacher's authority that most find unpleasant.

Other forces may add to the difficulty of depending on personal authority. In the past decade, efforts to increase equality in the schools has often had the unintended consequence of setting up adversarial relations between school and community. As different groups press for their rights, it is almost by definition the school that is seen as standing in their way: it is the school as an institution that failed to provide adequate education for the handicapped, the bilingual, or the inner city child. The society as a whole may be seen as responsible, but it is the school that is expected to change.

Communities and special interest groups press for more, and the schools attempt to comply as well as to stem the growing demands on their time and expertise. To achieve the goal of equality, rules, regulations, and legislation aim to organize the relations between clients and the schools. Remedies found in due process further encourage challenges to the authority of the school as an institution and the teacher as an individual. The increasing availability of the legal right to challenge administrative decisions may enhance the impression that the authority of schoolpeople is on the decline. This is not to say that efforts to increase quality and empower the clients of the schools are bad or wrong, but rather to point out that they add (1) to the sense of diminished authority and (2) to the legitimacy of challenge.

Proceduralism is only one of the factors invoked to explain the decrease in the schools' perceived ability to counter student misbehavior. Duke (1977) points out that many explanations are offered, most of which take blame away from the individual, place it on society as a whole, and turn all of us into victims. The explanations include: family background, peer group influence, the quality of teaching, the school as an organization, and society in general. Many of the charges made against the schools are blanket indictments of the institution: they cover everything from curriculum and types of teachers to vocational education. Blanket indictments, however, make it difficult to know how to take corrective measures.

> In thinking about the various arguments implicating the school system in the genesis of behavior problems, one fact stands out. As the focus for blame becomes more diffuse, the quality of supporting evidence decreases. Fewer efforts to blame the school system are based on samples than are the studies that single out family background, peer group, or teacher variables. A greater tendency also exists for critics of the school system to make sweeping statements condemning factors that are very difficult to define or measure, such as "mindlessness" and competitive values.

> . . . even if blame eventually could be laid at the school's doorstep, the buck would not necessarily stay there. After all, if schools do no more than reflect the interests and biases prevailing in society-at-large, then the ultimate culprit, barring an indictment of the divine, must be the society itself! (Duke, 1977, p.23)

But indictments of the society make a remedy yet more difficult. How are we to do away with student misconduct if the society in general is to blame for it?

Finally, it is important to pay close attention to the mixed messages that we as a society give to our youth. As we mentioned at the outset, American education and child-rearing has always held the twin goals of control and freedom for the individual. During the last decade or two, we have successfully freed youth from the constraints of earlier times in which we expected them to obey their elders; we have asked them to be inquisitive and challenging. What we may be reaping is a particularly rich, and perhaps in part unwelcome, harvest. If this is so, then we need to think carefully about the meaning of students' behavior, and what that behavior implies for schools as organizations. We begin this task by considering the erosion of traditional authority that teachers describe.

The Erosion of Traditional Authority

Challenges to teachers' authority take many forms, from disrespectful behavior to failure to attend class or do homework. All of them disturb teachers, but those which involve personal interactions with students seem to be the most troubling. When experienced teachers are asked about the behavior of today's high school students, most do not speak of violence or assault, but of "insubordination" or "rudeness," of liberties taken or negative attitudes expressed. One teacher, whose sentiments were echoed by many others, reported,

> I spend a lot of time trying to justify what they learn in school, why I think that they ought to know these things. But they just don't care. They raise questions about why they have to do certain things--like write a research paper or analyze a poem . . . . It's frequent for the kids to speak out and say that an assignment is ridiculous.

The readiness of students to criticize their teachers extends beyond assigned work to other areas of teachers' professional performance. What surprised this teacher was the impunity with which students challenge teachers' competence. Asked whether students argued with her about grades she gives or tried to negotiate higher grades, she said:

> Very little argument about grades occurs. But students are often very free to offer criticism about the classes in the evaluations that they do. They don't seem to have any qualms about criticizing, and they don't seem to feel as though it will be used against them.

Students' disregard for homework and grades also represents a challenge. One teacher, puzzled by students' unconcern, said,

> I'm amazed at the kids who won't do their homework even though they get a steady stream of zeros and haven't prepared--or who continue to come to class. A lot of them just come and sit, and I can't understand why. You'd think they'd be so bored.

Another, speaking about the differences between the ability groups she teaches, said that while the accelerated group was very conscientious,

> some students in the lower tracks consistently get zeros. . . . It's very hard to deal with. I can't understand why so many students don't care about so many zeros. I try to give them a little speech from time to time, telling them that employers will look at the record, see all those zeros, and it won't reflect well on them, but it doesn't seem to have any impact. The kids are pretty lethargic on the whole.

Teachers also reported that students fail to complete assignments they don't like.

> Students have a different attitude toward studying--or maybe you could call it authority--than when I was in school. Kids question a lot more now than they used to. . . . They're ready

> and quick to say that you're telling them to do something that they think is irrelevant or is busy work, and that they won't do it . . . . I might have kids write an essay a week, and try to get them to do it. But if I did, I wouldn't get the assignments done. The kids just hate to write. So I have to be careful to devise a list of subjects that they can choose from so that they can find something that's of interest to them . . . . [Otherwise] I might press them to do it, and some of them would get it in, but it would create a hostile attitude in some students and in the class.

Students do, however, tend to respond to negotiation, rather than flatly rejecting teachers' requests. Another teacher said that getting students to complete their work required flexibility:

> If the kids hate to write, for example, I'll let them give a presentation to the class. Or if they hate to talk as well, then they can use a tape recorder and I'll grade them on the recording. As far as I'm concerned, the important thing is to get them to do their work, and you have to be flexible . . . .

Though some of these teachers were puzzled or dismayed by their students' behavior, they accommodated to it, feeling that they had lost the authority to demand that students submit homework, write essays, or do the selected assignments.

These reports are supported by reports from students. Many say that they do not feel obliged to do their homework, attend classes regularly or on time, or serve detentions. One student suggested that widespread noncompliance justified her own failure to do her homework.

> Nobody wants to sit down and do homework, you know. Most kids, they'd rather be outside and with sports; if you do sports, it's really tough, because . . . you have to devote all your time after school, every single day of the week. And then you get home about 5:30 and it's time to eat dinner, and then it's time to sit down and do homework, and either by then you're too tired or a lot of people just don't do homework anyway.

Another student mentioned that he had received several detentions for being late to class, but had served only two. Asked what happened when he didn't serve the others, he replied,

> They just add on more time and then try to get your name into the office, and the office calls you down and it depends who you are, I mean, what you did and stuff like that. Sometimes you get suspended for a couple of periods or something like that.

He added that often when he was late he did not receive a detention:

> I've only had two detentions 'cause I try to make it to class on time, but if I don't make it, I just tell the teacher, 'I live ten miles from here, so . . . I ain't walking so I ain't going to your detention,' and they just drop it. Most of the time.

Reports such as these do not mean that students' complaints about teachers are new; they are old complaints but they have come out of the closet. Students are now speaking and acting in ways they only thought about in the past. And more students explicity question teachers' traditional prerogatives in terms of the teachers' professional judgment and technical skill. In response, teachers tend to counter these challenges with protracted explanations or negotiated settlements about the terms of assigned work. Dealing with challenge by dismissing it or by pulling rank no longer appears to be acceptable practice.

Challenge and negotiation in schools may be a by-product of our times. They occur at all levels of society, and are particularly visible in the organized efforts of many groups pressing their interests on public institutions. Labor unions, teacher organizations, and groups representing migrant works, the elderly, and the handicapped have brought their claims to public attention, using the media to generate public support for their demands. And even within institutions, struggles once considered internal have become public thorugh class action suits and the intervention of the courts. Many of these challenges rest on the questioning of the expertise or competence of those who work in public settings, and many have been upheld by the courts. The right of individuals and groups to challenge and be heard, and the need for institutions

to be responsive, has been legitimized over the past few decades. Acquiescence to institutional authority is no longer as reflexive as it once was.

In this climate, it would be surprising if challenges involving competence and fair treatment were not a common occurrence in public high schools. But it would also be surprising if teachers, though welcoming curiosity and independence of mind on one hand, did not feel threatened and uncertain how to respond on the other. They find it easier to respond--and are more responsive--when challenge is presented in a way that does not raise the threat of conflict; students' efforts to influence them are more acceptable than overt rebellion. A teacher discussed various ways in which students' tried to influence her, distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable approaches.

> There's more respect for authority among the brighter kids . . . . [They] are more able to negotiate to get something changed, like an assignment, while the average kids won't negotiate at all. I think this is because the brighter kids recognize that they have more power with teachers. They don't seem to feel as helpless in the classroom . . . . The other kids will bitch and complain about assignments, or they won't do them. But brighter kids, if they have an argument, will tend to come up and see if they can influence the system and the assignments. With me, that's pretty easy to do, and I try hard to accommodate their wishes.

Thus in some cases, a student's behavior is seen as a provocation; it threatens conflict and is unacceptable. In others, students question authority in a manner that is considered respectful and elicits accommodation. But however skillfully they do it, these students are challenging the ascribed authority teachers formerly held to manage the learning process. It is the way the question is posed, rather than the question itself, which disturbs this this teacher, thus distinguishing her conception of the teacher's domain of authority from those of a previous generation.

The form of the challenge is important to teachers because it involves

regard and respect. Teachers feel that they have had to capitulate on many fronts--homework, course standards, and school rules--and that this has compromised their professional performance. But some feel personally as well as professionally violated when students question their competence, or speak to them in an unduly familiar way. Many of them speak with dismay of behavior that blurs the distinction between student and teacher roles. Echoing the complaints of many, one teacher, who had been out of the classroom for several years and had recently returned, commented as follows:

> Today's generation of high school students are not really very different. They're pretty much the same--still want to get their licenses, have cars, and so on. But they used to be more respectful. I've had no discipline problems, but they're just not as respectful. By that I mean that they're free in such things as using sexual terminology. I don't mean swearing, but making references about sexual activity or jibes to me about my sex life . . . . That would have been utterly taboo 10 years ago. But the students are freer to say almost anything they want to the teacher. They're just not trained to approach the teacher properly . . . to put a teacher at a slightly higher level than them.

This teacher thinks of respect in terms of attention to role differences; he does not want to be treated as another student. Students, however, speak of respect in terms of equality. To be treated not as an equal is to be denied respect. As one student expressed it:

> I think [relationships with teachers] are based on respect. If they respect me, I'm going to respect them. You know, if they respect . . . I think the answer that I gave is right. And there is nothing they're going to do about changing it. If they treat me, you know, with a nice personality, they treat me as if I'm an equal to them, we're going to get along fine. But, you know, when they start giving you the hassles, I'm going to start giving them the hassles, so to speak. I can make life as tough on them as they can make it on me.

In this view, role and age differences do not matter; respect is simply being treated as an equal.

Such conflicting values about what constitutes appropriate behavior help to explain why teachers are distressed by their interaction with today's students. Students are less likely to reserve their opinions, expressing them freely to teachers rather than reserving them for discussion with their peers. Sometimes this may be a form of defiance, but often it seems to reflect the importance now attached to self-expression.

This represents new values that are adrift in the culture. Today's generation of teenagers has been raised in a cultural milieu which encou ages frank and direct expression of one's feelings and attitudes. Prime time television, interviews with idols and cult figures of the generation, and even the plethora of memoirs recording the private lives of film stars, athletes, and politicians have made the public confessional an important genre of our times. From the rash of popular psychology books which extol free expression to the rush of public enthusiasm for encounter groups, sensitivity training, Esalen and EST, the society has been steeped in moral lessons about the importance of "being oneself." Openness and candor have replaced discretion and diffidence as the prime virtues. Little matter if such virtues are valued more for their style than their substance; word has been out for the past two decades, and self-expression is in.

This new style creates conflicts for many, and particularly those who work in high schools. Many of today's high school teachers came of age in the 1960s, when these new ideas were germinating, and became partisans of them. But they were equally influenced by the values of the earlier generation which raised them. Though they advocate the new ideas, they have not forgotten the old. The result was a collision of values, which for many created uncertainty and ambivalence about what constitutes the right values

and appropriate behavior. While openness was admired, the behavior it inspired, particularly in the young, seemed to threaten social stability and traditional beliefs. In addition, as these teachers grew older and assumed more responsibility, conservative impluses tended to grow stronger.

This ambivalence about acceptable standards of behavior is particularly sharp for many high school teachers, because a central part of their work involves socialization. Instruction in citizenship and proper adult behavior are fundamental responsibilities of high schools, and teachers take them seriously. Furthermore, socialization--always a difficult task--is made yet more difficult by uncertainty about what behavior to encourage as values and standards begin to change. There are few clear guidelines for teachers except tradition, but as their own values shift the guidelines of an earlier time seem less useful. In addition, it is not clear what values the community would like reinforced. In the midst of this, teachers are ambivalent and unsure. They complain of their students' lack of respect and manners, but they respond to this behavior as legitimate. When students challenge homework assignments or test items, they respond as if that were acceptable and demanded an acceptable response. Paradoxically, teachers seem to suffer from the same malady that is thought to afflict their students--the lack of clear standards to guide in-school behavior.

Teachers believe that the loss of their authority is rooted in social changes outside the schools. Unlike much of society and many education reformers, they don't believe that what they teach or how they teach it is no longer relevant or interesting. Nor do they think that students are rebelling against community and parental values. They believe that community values have changed and that the behavior of students reflects those changes. They also think

that students interests have expanded beyond what schools can satisfy. Work, in particular, is considered to be a major preoccupation of students. Teachers say that jobs provide teen-agers with far greater satisfaction and sense of accomplishment than family life or participation in school activities. According to one teacher,

> Some kids are working to pay their way to college, which is understandable considering how much it costs. But lots of kids, especially the 9th graders, do it to get away from home where things are really lousy. They don't have much to do in this town aside from school, and if they can get jobs and earn money, which produces some tangible benefit for them, and if that gets them out of the house, too, it serves a double purpose . . . . A lot of the low ability kids have told me that they prefer their jobs to anything else that they're doing. Even a lot of the younger kids who are in the 9th grade and legally below the age where they can work, are working 20 hours a week and say that's the best thing in their lives.

This teacher directs music and theatre productions at the high school, but she plans to withdraw after the current year because so many students don't make it to rehearsals:

> They're enthusiastic when it's time for tryouts and they like to try out and win the parts . . . but they begin to become bored with the amount of work that's required, or they can't handle the rehearsals and their jobs as well as their schoolwork, so they begin to miss rehearsals, which results in mediocre productions . . . . So I'm not going to do it after this year.

The principal in another high school also believes that today's students are more interested in work than school, and that this has affected extra-curricular participation across the board: "Attendance is down in sports, for example. The parents go; in fact, they provide the biggest turnout for the games." One teacher thinks that of the people in their lives, students have the highest regard for their employers.

> A lot of students have a great deal of respect for the employers, and I wonder about that. It seems to me as if they give a lot more respect to their employers than they do to the teachers in school.

In her view, education has been replaced by other, more important interests among her students:

> I think that it is assumed by most teachers that the students' school work has a lower priority than other things . . . . At least I make that assumption, and I certainly make it more now than I did seven years ago.

She is convinced that the long hours many students spend working is one reason why they don't do assigned homework--so much so that she assigns less than she used to:

> I go along with it because the students would challenge me if I tried to give them more. I would give more even if they did, but too many of them are working, and they won't do it . . . . But I don't believe they're lazy. They put their energy into work rather than school work.

Teachers across the country believe that students work for satisfaction they can't get at home or school, or for money for cars, college, social lives, or clothes. Many also believe that students' families often encourage them to work, and that work is permitted to compete with school. One teacher said,

> Their parents, even the wealthy ones, are backed against a wall by inflation and the rising cost of living. So they encourage the kids to get jobs in subtle ways, even if at home they encourage them to put their energy into academic work.

The principal in her school added support to this view:

> Most kids work because they need or want the money. Many are under a lot of pressure this year to make money--even kids who come from executive families. A lot of kids will work now when they didn't used to.

School staff believe that work and other interests predominate in the lives of teen-agers not because school is less interesting, but because other things have become more important. They appear not to blame the schools, nor

to feel that schools can do much to change the situation. Rather, they believe that students' interests have shifted, and that the shift is often reinforced by their families. Many teachers and administrators reported that parents excuse poor school performance, lateness, or unwillingness to do homework on the grounds that their children are working and don't have time to meet all of the requirements of the school.

If parents and students value work more than school, many teachers believe that it is because the value of education has declined in contemporary society. Students stay in school because they know that diplomas are important; dropping out is unacceptable, or "shocking," as one teacher's students found it. But it is the credential, rather than what students may learn in school, that is valued. One teacher speculated about his students' perceptions of the relation between education and their future lives:

> Brighter kids do see the relationship between the two, but they are the rare exception. I think [in these cases] the ideas are learned at home. If parents don't see the value of reading or self-expression then they won't pass it on to their children. Too many have a too narrow-minded view about the value of education and think about it only in terms of job, not in terms of less direct things that they might learn . . . . This is different from the way things used to be. We take education much more for granted now. It used to be that education was very important because few people had it. It was a means to an end which was identified as something like success. But now . . . you don't have to have education to be successful.

An English teacher in the same school agreed, and cited the schools' repeated message to students that the credential, rather than academic learning, is what counts. But she believes that students are learning that the diploma comes with no guarantees:

> They have been told over and over, and do believe, that a diploma is important. This isn't true just of my lower-phase students . . . . All of them talk in terms of either what's required to pass the course, or what's required to get a

> good grade. Seldom do they express any interest at all in the subject for its own sake, or because it's interesting . . . . The upper-level students think of learning in terms of college requirements, and they as well as lower-level students talk in terms of making money. But they don't see a relationship between what they learn and making money . . . just between the diploma and making money. But even at that, I think they see that sometimes that relationship breaks down, and that some people who have diplomas don't succeed.

Both teachers believe that to students it is the credential rather than the content of schooling that really counts. But they and others suggested that students now also see instances where the diploma did not lead to much success, or where success came to those without diplomas.

Our conversations with students support both observations. They believe that diplomas are important, but also that family connections or simple luck can compensate for the lack of credentials. This, perhaps, has always been true; indeed, it may be less true in contemporary society, where professionalizing and credentialing a wide range of occupations has become a passion. But insofar as students believe that future jobs and financial success depend less on formal schooling, this is a shift away from the inherited association between schooling and mobility. Evidence on this point is too fragmentary for firm conclusions, but evidence does not always shatter strong beliefs. Teachers report that students today see routes to success that do not include the need for credentials. Teachers take this as a sign that society's attitudes toward formal education are changing such that other things seem equally important for success.

Thus, teachers link the loss of their former authority partly to the premium that parents and students now place on working after school. When education was reserved for the few or difficult to obtain, schools and teachers were more highly regarded as holding the gate to mobility and success. But

as more and more students stayed on to complete high school and alternative diploma routes became available--military programs and night schools, correspondence courses and high school equivalency tests, and programs that combined school with work--the diploma became a common commodity and thus of less value.

The status of teachers slipped for other reasons as well. One teacher explained:

> It used to be that the lives of the town kids were in the hands of teachers, and they were respected. Now teachers go on strike and they get arrested and the parents see this. Now many people think it's an easy job, too. Maybe it's because teachers aren't paid well, maybe the parents know that there are lots of people who don't have even high school educations who can earn more than teachers. Also I think that there is a lot of bad talk about teachers at home over dinner tables and out in the community, and it rubs off on the kids. These attitudes of parents and community toward teachers rubs off on the kids, so how can you expect them to be very respectful?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL AUTHORITY

We have argued that the traditional authority of the teacher, limited although that might have been, is now even more unlikely to support teachers in their relations with students. Teachers cannot expect to be heeded when they bristle: "Do this work because I am your teacher." Nor do teachers want this kind of impersonal relationship. Students and teachers agree that they prefer classroom interactions based on personal commitment rather than on institutional demands. The data suggest that students' willingness to grant teachers personal authority is based on a combination of the teachers' respect, social skills and technical expertise.

Social Skills

More than anything else, students seem to want to be taken seriously; they want teachers to see them as unique and respect them as individuals with

legitimate interests and points of view. For example, one student commented that she did not like teachers who altered creative work she had produced:

> I don't like a teacher who changes your work around. I write short stories and hand them in and they change them. I hate the kind of teacher who changes your work. Mrs. X doesn't do that. She makes suggestions.

Another student wanted to be treated as an individual in his own right:

> We didn't expect an easy lady, but we expected her to be fair. But she goes by the book. We're like stereotypes. But she should treat us as individuals. We get looked down on and blamed for the vandalism. We're dragged down for nothing and embarrassed in front of everyone.

Another student described the generational differences that appear in all student-teacher relations.

> You know, I've heard [it said] that parents and teachers know more than students and . . . children . . . . I know they've grown up with this and that, but times have changed . . . and maybe . . . we do know a little bit more than our teachers do. I feel as if I do--I don't know if that's sounding . . . I feeling I know a little bit more than my teachers or my parents, although I try to express my opinion and they say 'Well, we know how you feel, we've lived through this and that.' And I say, 'I don't care, I don't care what you know, and this is what I know.' They tell you that's not true now. Well I'm trying to figure out how they know it's not true.

We note that students are concerned with their individuality. They are serious and they are in discomfort. They may not be the best students in the world, or the best-behaved, but it is hard to ignore their wish to be treated as people. They don't want to be patronized for their inexperience, nor treated as stereotypes. While they do not mention shared responsibility, they know what they want and believe they deserve. When a teacher is able to meet these needs, the student is likely to respond with respect and admiration and grant the teacher authority to make demands.

Teachers broadly agree with students about what is needed to establish

and maintain mutual respect. As the following reports from teachers show, they know that their relationship with the students is not guaranteed or durable, no longer based on their position as teacher but negotiated in the day-to-day life of the classroom.

> A classroom teacher gets authority by building rapport with his students. He can't get it by trying to rest it on fear. Teachers have to rely on consistency and following through . . . . Also, there aren't any discipline problems . . . if the teacher is interesting and enthusiastic. The best way of earning the students' respect is through interpersonal relations. That's one of the reasons for not getting into fights in class, because there are some students in the class that will side with the kid and you lose their respect.
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> Teachers need to be fast on their feet in order to deal with what kids do now. We have fewer sanctions, and have to deal with verbal responses . . . . Also, though, the kids just don't respect me. I feel as if I have to earn respect from them. That gets determined in the first few months of the school year, and if it isn't determined then it won't happen.
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> Kids don't appreciate the fact that someone is a teacher; they appreciate what it is that you do for them and if you care for them. You have to show concern and let them know you love them. Your respect has to be earned. You have to forget that 'I am the teacher.'

These comments by students and teachers clearly reveal a shift in values. Where formerly students were unlikely to express their feelings to their teachers, grudgingly accepting their lower status and lack of rights, the emphasis on personal fulfillment during the last decade has brought these feelings into the open. Teachers see the resulting behavior as provocation and themselves as potential victims involved in countless confrontations; and they respond with greater or lesser unease.

Students may not intend to create this uneasiness in teachers; they may simply be acting by the beliefs that they grew up with that support questioning and challenge of authority. They may expect not capitulation, but

a good argument or exchange. To the students, challenge and conflict may be part of normal personal interactions, part of a day's work in school. Teachers who can interpret students' challenges in this more modest and modern way may feel less threatened by the new order.

There is some support for this point of view from teachers such as these two, who have spent ten or more years in the schools and have experienced the turbulence of the 60s and the quieter times of today.

> I'm more optimistic about education now than when I started in 1969, when there were all kinds of problems of the war and drugs and so forth. The kids were not interested in school. I think I'm in a minority, but I think kids are more interested . . . now. By the time I get them as seniors, they know what they want to do after school . . . . If they've chosen to take my courses . . . they have an interest in what's going on in the class. Now in U.S. History they're interested in studying the past. They used to argue about the relevancy of [that] . . . . I don't think that I have to pander to them as much as I used to in order to get them to work. I think this is because society has changed and in many ways has become much more conservative. This conservatism gets reflected in the greater amount of respect that students have for their teachers who take their work seriously.
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> I started teaching 18 years ago and as far as discipline is concerned I don't think that the kids are for the most part any different . . . . They are more apt to talk back and more apt to challenge, but all kids respond to good teaching and that sort of behavior doesn't occur in classes where there is good teaching going on.

These teachers recognize a shift in the basis of their authority, and in particular a broader range of acceptable behavior in students. Under the more traditional authority that stressed differences in the status of teachers and students, social norms limited the topics that teachers and students could discuss and the issues that could be challenged.

The 60s seem to have done much to open up the range of debatable issues; this, as much as (or as a part of) the loss of traditional authority, seems to add to the teachers' dilemma. Not only must they earn the respect of the

students, but that respect must be based on standards of behavior that the teacher may not accept. Yet increased openness may have to be tolerated if personal relations with students are to develop.

If there ever was a time in which teachers were held at a distance, respected and feared, those times are no longer. Students never mentioned a teacher who was loved and feared at the same time. There were no stories of the tyrant teacher who taught the best class in the school. Instead, students talk about the teacher's ability to create a climate in which they are comfortable and feel some confirmation as individuals. They respect the teacher who respects them:

> Irene and Peggy--They're good teachers. She tried her best to help you. She don't show no favors to nobody--boys, girls, ugly, pretty; it don't matter. You can tell her things and she won't tell nobody. They won't report you if it's none of their business. The teachers that bother me, I bother them. If they bust may ass, then I get them.

In addition to wanting respect for themselves, students want teachers to be interesting and colorful. This may be tied to age: some students prefer older teachers, others can accept only recent graduates. But all of them want teachers who share some part of their personal life with them.

> The ideal teacher . . . I don't know . . . I like to get along with my teachers. . . . I don't know how to say it . . . . I like teachers who aren't just straight school; they get off on other subjects once in a while. I like to do other things. Also their personality--they're just really nice. And they . . . joke around a lot.

Other students echo these sentiments:

> If it's a very in-depth learning class, sometimes you don't get a chance to get very close to the teacher, but then other times you do. Like I have AP English, . . . we learn an awful lot and we do an awful lot of work, but yet somehow you get to know [the teacher] and you really get to like him. But then there are teachers . . . that you can't get to know. And a lot of people won't like him. And that varies. I mean it can go from the students and the teacher not communicating at

> all, to having a mother/daughter, daughter/father type relationship with certain teachers.

Some students want very much to think of their teachers not a parent, but as an equal.

> I think if they get along with you, . . . not just teach you the stuff and . . . I think that they should get along, you know, be friends . . . . Like my geometry teacher's that way. Everyone gets along with her . . . . I did good in that class, geometry, like B work . . . . I think if you get along with the students and, you know, make it a little more interesting, it can be more educational.
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> I like when a teacher jokes around like sometimes, and then gets serious about working . . . instead of being serious every day, you know "get the books out and keep going". . . . I like to start the class off slowly, you know, start joking and stuff like that . . . it would just be being friendly with the kids. But if you go to class, get the books out, go over the homework and stuff like that right away, it's not too enjoyable.

Students want a lot from their teachers. While they do want subject matter expertise, they also want teachers who have broad interests, a pleasant personality, a sense of humor, a steady disposition, and endless patience. As changing social norms encourage candor, teachers are faced with a range of student issues that would never have been public in past years. From dating problems to drinking, from sex and crime to family problems, students are bringing their concerns to school. They are looking to their teachers to be subject matter experts as well as human relations experts, entertainers, and technicians. And, as one student pointed out, there are no universal standards.

> Each kid has a different feeling for every teacher. It's like there are a lot of students that don't like one teacher but then there's another group that really like that teacher. So like there's no bad teacher and good teacher in this school.

These are large demands, and they require a great deal of the teacher who attempts to fulfill them all.

Technical Skill

In addition to their wish for respect and their ideas about the ideal teacher's personality and style, students also have views about teachers' expertise. They divide expertise into three parts: teachers' knowledge of the subject, their ability to convey it to the students, and their ability to control the students and maintain a classroom climate that fosters teaching and learning.

Students admire teachers who know what they are talking about and so present material in such a way that it can be easily assimilated. They do not like teachers who waste their time, or who fail to do what students consider teaching.

> Well I'll tell ya about the one [teacher] that sticks out in my mind that was not a good teacher . . . an English teacher in my freshman year. . . . We saw movies . . . and movies, and movies. And it wasn't anything to do with English. And she was totally into movies and she happened to also be the filmmaking teacher for the senior elective course for English, which also has been cancelled because it wasn't considered English. Not for the seniors, but um . . . just learning prepositions in the whole year, or . . . what a gerund is . . . . And then there's teachers that show you what the rule is, and to explain it they'll read it over again . . . . And that doesn't work out. A good teacher can explain one thing in different ways to get it across to the kid.
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> Some teachers don't really teach. They start something, then they say "no, I don't know how to explain this right" and . . . just forget it. They'll give us homework one night on how to do it, they'll give us a test the next day and then they'll show us how to do it. That's happened to me a couple times.
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> I didn't understand a thing [in algebra] and I just didn't think she was any good for a teacher . . . . Like when you'd ask her a question, she'd almost make you scared of her after a while because she acted so exasperated at you . . . . And I'd ask her for help after school and she wouldn't be able to give it to me because she'd say "well, I have this other job" . . . after school.
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> Well, I think some of them are all right, but I think others are just . . . out to get their paycheck. They just . . . like English . . . I don't think they really teach it too good. Like the vocabulary . . . first we start off with like ten words and we gotta know like all the synonyms and all the antonyms and . . . just put down on a piece of paper and they say all right learn it . . . . But . . . I took reading and my teacher there was helping me. She gave me like study tips and she's not even my English teacher. You know the English teacher wouldn't give us any tips on studying. They just give us the book and say "all right, study; test Thursday," or whatever . . . . The English teacher likes to go over . . . literature and stuff, but . . . the vocabulary . . . really got me mad this year. They just throw it at you and say "here, study it." And a lot of kids flunked this year in English because of vocabulary.

It is difficult to evaluate such comments. On the one hand, the students are aware of the qualities that are important to them; on the other, it is not clear that they want to expend much effort on their school work, or contribute actively to the relationship. When stude complain that they don't want to study vocabulary words on their own, we do not know whether they want the teacher to spend enough time on the words in class so that they learn them there, or whether they have not been taught and cannot figure out how to study vocabulary words.

Perhaps changing ideas about the social organization of work also make working alone seem unpleasant. Students may be arguing about the isolation as much as about the difficulty of the assignment. Students who say they prefer their jobs sometimes comment on the personal interactions involved in a task, which elicit their enthusiasm, commitment, and effort.

> You know the shop teachers get along with their students good. I think they get along better because they're all working together. That's what I think it is.

From the teacher's point of view, many of the students' charges of poor teaching are unfounded. Rather, teachers say, the students

put little effort into their school work, spend more time challenging the teacher than doing the work, and refuse to do the work assigned. Teachers see this as further proof of their loss of authority. But again, it is hard to evaluate how this affects teachers' ability to teach. While many teachers complained about these conditions, some saw students' behavior in more moderate terms. For example,

> Hardly a day goes by when students don't raise questions about why they should be studying what we're studying . . . and why they should have to do some particular assignment . . . . I used to try to please [them] . . . but regardless, there's a lot of complaining . . . in all of the classes, not just science, and the kids ask frequently why they have to do it . . . . My colleagues . . . all report the same thing, but they also say that despite all the griping, the kids pretty much do the work they are told to do.

While it may be that students challenge more often and do less work, it may also be that they challenge more, but when pressed do as they are told.

The way teachers react to students behavior and lack of effort may compound the problem in a circular, destructive fashion. Teachers often interpret the students' demand for better teaching as a desire to be spoonfed; and while there may be some truth in this, that may not be the whole story. Yet teachers' responses can help to make it true. In trying to avoid conflict and prevent what they perceive as further loss of authority, teachers meet students' complaints by negotiating assignments and requiring less work. The result can be perverse: students may say that such teachers are responsive to their demands, while the teacher may feel that they are shortchanging the students in the long run--thus doing them a disservice but helpless to counter their pressure for less work.

> Giving [the kids] a lousy assignment, even if they do it, makes it hard to get them to respond to the next assignment that I give even if they like it. So the way I look at it,

> I have to develop a level of trust in them, so that they'll be willing to tackle assignments that only seem partly interesting. [Also, if] they get discouraged they won't do the work. I use classtime to help them learn to use library resources, even when there are some students in the class that know how to, because so many of the kids are working after school that I can't count on them to go into the library and talk to the librarian on their own.

This teacher's comments reveal how greatly she relies on negotiation for personal authority. She is aware that if she asks too much, in the eyes of the students, they may become hostile and destroy the positive climate of the classroom. If she assigns too little, she will feel inadequate. As she notes, she has to make some easy and popular assignments in exchange for students' trust, which will then allow her to require some mildly unpleasant work. Uncertainty pervades this kind of negotiated order. The quality of the education the students are receiving, and who should judge the quality and content of their work, are questions the teacher has answered: this is a negotiated area and teachers' standards do not necessarily prevail. As a bottom line, this teacher comments:

> If they don't do the work, then there is no learning taking place at all. I'd rather negotiate with them and have them do something because at least they'll be learning, than to get into arguments with them where nothing gets done and I know that no learning is taking place.

Other teachers agree that they must compromise their standards to maintain some authority with the students. They find it demoralizing to assign homework that is never completed and to argue constantly about the value of particular assignments. From the teachers' point of view, many challenges by students have less to do with a desire for more input into their education than with a desire for less responsibility for their own learning.

> I'm exasperated. Why should I work hard for them when they don't do it for themselves--or for me? You'd think they'd at least try to show some interest because I'm

> interested, but they just think it's a bore. I spend a lot of time trying to justify what they learn in school, why I think they ought to know these things. But they just don't care.

Teachers thus translate the need for personal authority into an assessment of how much work can be assigned before the students begin to balk. That assessment, rather than an established belief about the value of the work, controls the quantity and kind of assignments that teachers make. Surely this is a dramatic shift from what we believe used to motivate teachers in assigning work.

Administrators share the belief that the classroom teacher's authority is threatened by a negative climate. One administrator gave this as a reason for limiting the authority of classroom teachers in assigning punishments such as detentions.

> I have more authority than classroom teachers. The teachers' major problem is that they are unable to make their punishments and their authority stick, and that's partly because they have to be concerned about maintaining a climate in the classroom where teaching can continue with that student after the incident has passed.

There are, of course, students who say that they prefer a teacher who makes them work hard, and teachers who do not find students unwilling to do or uninterested in their school work; but in this sample they are a small minority.

Though unable to evaluate students' and teachers' comments, we can say that students are remarkably well-informed, thoughtful, and vocal about teacher characteristics that are important to them. If they are going to sit in classes, they want to learn something and they want the teacher to help them. Teachers who successfully engage the students in their work gain a measure of respect and admiration. Teachers are not wholly without authority; but they have no guarantees. They depend upon the relationships they can develop with their

students, and these in part depend on a combination of teachers' personality and technical expertise. Perhaps some years back students preferred to work for teachers whom they liked, but worked for others nevertheless; today there appears to be a closer tie between students' opinion of the teacher and the amount of work they are willing to do. Further, students want to be involved with teachers who share some part of themselves as people, and who are interested as well in the students as unique individuals. The picture drawn by the students is one that involves the personal commitment of the teacher to each student. As one student aptly said:

> I think that a good teacher is one that's willing to help you, you know, with any kind of problem, whether it's in-a-school problem or out-of-school problem. Like the teacher wants to get involved in the students and the students get involved, you know. I think that's a really good . . . relationship. And like the bad teachers, . . . you know, [just] come into class, give you the class work, say "that's it," and once class is over, the student's off and the teacher's off and there's nothing between them.

It is hard to know whether this often expressed desire for close personal relations between students and teachers represents a loss, a gain, or simply a change for the teacher in terms of authority. It looks like a loss if one thinks that the traditional authority teachers may have had was better or more than the negotiated order that now exists. Yet popular wisdom has it that commitment to a person or an institution is not well developed when it is based on coercion or power. It may be that when teachers were authority figures in the traditional sense, they had less impact or a different impact on the emotional and social development of their students. The social distance between them was great, and students were not seeking emotional support from their school experience. Today, students' comments suggest that the teacher's potential for influencing them is great if unrealized. Students want the close

personal commitment that generally is part of a relationship whose participants value one another and can influence each other's behavior. Students may indeed be looking to teachers to fill the social and emotional gaps that many claim are going unfilled in families. They may be seeking more from teachers because they are getting less elsewhere. Such a relationship must involve conflict, for it is highly charged. But that conflict may be a sign of a healthy rather than a failing relationship.

CONCLUSION

We have argued in this paper that authority relations between teachers and students in high schools have changed: traditional authority has been replaced by personal authority resting on technical competence and interpersonal skill. Students no longer grant authority to their teachers merely because they are teachers, but challenge them to earn it by demonstrating instructional skill, subject mastery, and social skills. Although the public has come to believe that the breakdown in school authority is caused by many things--permissive child rearing, an irresponsible and undisciplined generation of young people, the intervention of courts and civil liberties groups that have tied schoolpeople's hands, the failings of contemporary schools--we have argued that it reflects a shift to personally or technically based authority that is occurring all across American society. Traditional authority is being challenged successfully, and individuals or institutions that once held it are increasingly required to prove their claims to authoritative positions.

This represents quite a change, and it poses new problems. Schools have historically served as a lightning rod for public debate about social change. As cultural values begin to shift and the familiar social order weakens, people

become anxious. Their need for social stability is threatened, and there is no reassurance that the change will be an improvement. Schools, unlike other public institutions, are particularly vulnerable targets for these anxieties. They are empowered to shape the next generation by transmitting social values and beliefs. When new values emerge the change stands out in relief in young people because their behavior is subject to so much cultural scrutiny and discussion. Thus new dress styles or the introduction of sex education in schools precipitates debates about the values such action expresses. The battles which ensue may be particularly fierce, as with sex education, in part because alternative institutions are not available. Advocates of every point of view struggle to ensure that theirs will dominate in the only game in town. Schools respond with caution; as public institutions, they sanction change only when it has met with broad public approval, as was the case with new styles of dress.

Another reason schools are vulnerable to public debate about changing values is that they are the most tractable of public institutions. Unlike big business or federal agencies, their workings are more visible, and they have historically been responsive to community influence. This encourages the belief that public action will be effective. Public anxieties about social change thus converge on the schools because they are the most accessible target and offer the least resistance. This combination of the schools' visibility, accessibility, and responsibility for socializing youth makes them particularly attractive forums for battles occurring in the larger society. Concern over shifting conceptions of authority is one battle now being fought out in the schools.

The fact that young people are less responsive to traditional forms of

authority than in the past and challenge it with greater frequency reinforces beliefs about the moral decay of contemporary youth and escalates public concern that violence in the schools is pervasive and mounting. Yet the varieties of challenge to authority that cause these anxieties--absenteeism, tardiness, and prickly reactions to direct commands--are not unique to youth. Rather than noting that much of the behavior that is considered to be so seriously deviant is widespread through all age levels in public and private institutions in contemporary society, youth's critics and school reformers propose corrective treatment, suggesting the malady is unique to youth and schools.

Although teachers in high schools recognize that traditional authority is eroding everywhere, they believe that they are hardest hit--that the authority they once held has shifted to other social institutions, the workplace chief among them. They also believe that standards of appropriate conduct are changing and that parents no longer feel obliged to teach their children the old traditions. In one sense, this is true: much of society has sung the praises of the new morality, and modes of behavior marked by honesty, openness, and self-expression have come into vogue. But these changes are not yet complete and they result in ambivalence; society mourns the loss of the old order even as it embraces the new. Expressions of changing values in teenage behavior are particularly threatening to many adults. Those in schools, who traditionally have been charged with shaping and molding youth for adult life and work, are often confused by the changes, and uncertain how to respond to them.

None of this provides easy prescriptions for teachers who are troubled by changes in high schools. If the erosion of traditional school authority reflects changes occurring in a variety of other public institutions and in

the larger society, it would be hard to make a case for the efficacy of re-asserting old traditions. After all, schools do not function in a social vacuum, nor do students live their lives entirely in schools. Changing conceptions of authority in families and workplaces--where students seem to spend increasing time--would undermine school efforts to enforce standards of behavior that apply only in school settings.

If changing ideas about authority have left teachers uncertain and confused, they are nevertheless adapting to the changes, though often with regret and discomfort. Their behavior suggests that they recognize the role that personal and technical competence plays in their work. They avoid conflict with students, and when it does arise they revert to personal forms of authority to see them through. Teachers call on the personal capital they have accumulated to encourage compliance; when that fails, they negotiate to find a standard with which students will comply. In many respects, teachers gain authority through these encounters. Under the new rules by which it is granted, their skill in dealing with students' challenges through negotiation earns them authority.

Yet negotiated authority also entails problems. Success depends on the judgment and skill of teachers as they deal with individual students about school work and behavior. This imposes an extraordinary burden on an already difficult job. Teachers who have a high tolerance for challenge and argument may be effective in getting some students to work, but the classrooms in which such arguments occur may be dysfunctional for the work of other students. In addition, negotiations are problematic for many teachers insofar as they assume an adversarial flavor or threaten conflict. Teachers believe that conflict damages personal authority; this may not be correct; but it is what

they believe. Student challenges thus threaten the only form of authority that teachers believe will work for them. In their eagerness to avoid conflict and retain their authority, teachers may concede far more to student preferences than is necessary. What results is fewer demands placed on students and lower standards of performance than might otherwise be realized. Erosion of authority may be compounded by abdication of authority.

Perhaps once the new form of authority is more firmly entrenched and better understood by a new generation of teachers raised on it, negotiations with students will be less stressful, and personal and technical authority more effective in stimulating desirable student behavior. Or it may be that in the absence of firm administrative and community support for clear standards--support which is often difficult to obtain, particularly in settings where different opinions about standards flourish--the work of teaching will continue to be problematic and distressing for many in the profession.

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Appendix: Design of the Study

The data for this report was generated through a series of in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and administrators in three comprehensive high schools. None of these schools were urban and we suspect that some of the lack of concern for crime and violence may be due to this sampling factor. However, we also re-analyzed and included in this report data gathered in a previous study of high schools. Three urban schools were part of that sample, and student and teacher comments about authority and violence were quite similar to those in the non-urban schools.

The Schools

School A is a grade 9-12 high school in the Northeast with a student population of just over 1,000 students. Sixty percent of the students from the high school go on to four year colleges. The community is predominantly middle-class and dominated by an international corporation that employs a substantial portion of the town's population, hiring many engineers and skilled laborers. Declining enrollment is an issue in the district; the school expects to lose about 200 students in the next five years.

School B is a grades 9-12 regional high school in a somewhat rural area of the Northeast serving three towns. The three towns provide a diverse student body: one is an upper middle-class professional community which sends 600 students to the school, another is a tiny farming community that sends 100 students, and the third is a working-class community that sends about 500 students. There are no reported social problems with the students from these three towns. Although the students do form cliques, the breakdown of social groups within the school does not tend to follow town lines.

School C is located in the Southwest in an area experiencing rapid

growth and changing ethnic concentrations. The school is a three year high school built to accommodate 2400 students; currently there are 2800 students enrolled. The school has a long history (it is the oldest school in the state) and takes great pride in its athletic accomplishments. The school seems to serve as a rallying point for the community, with social and athletic events well-attended.

The schools from which the data was re-analyzed were in the Northeast, far West and Southwest. They were all four-year comprehensive high schools ranging in size from 500 to 1800 students. Three were urban and two suburban.

In each school a sample of students from different programs or tracks in the school were selected to be interviewed. Therefore the data represents students who were academically successful as well as those who were not: students who were planning to attend some form of post-secondary education and those who were planning to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. The teachers and administrators in the sample represent staff who had been in the school for varying numbers of years. Most of those interviewed were experienced, with at least five and often more years in their current positions.

The interviews were structured with an agenda directed to issues of authority, student discipline, regard for teachers, students' academic interest, and the relation of school and work. The interviews with students were taped; extensive interview notes were taken during interviews with teachers and administrators. All respondents were guaranteed confidentiality.