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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on research to determine how a school's organizational conditions and conception of teaming relate to teachers' sentiments about their work. The study proposes that people shape their beliefs and actions in concert with the structures around them. Study participants were 42 teachers at four suburban middle schools that had adopted team teaching principles. For those in the best functioning teams, collegial work seemed to provide professional and emotional support which helped solve recurring problems faced by teachers by recognizing the common nature of the problems, sharing in solutions, acknowledging their limitations, and working toward changes to improve their practice. For teachers, good colleagues shared common goals for students, had complementary skills, and shared ideas. For individualists, there was greater emphasis on traits which allowed them to work independently, demonstrating competence in their own area and not interfering with others. While teaming demonstrated important results for those on the most effective teams, for many teachers on less effective teams, this organizational change had limited benefits and was sometimes seen as an unwelcome distraction. Finally, results are compared with earlier research on teacher isolation by Dan Lortie. Survey questions are included in appendix. (Contains 30 references.) (ND)

TEACHERS, TEAMS,...AND THEIR STUDENTS

by

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OVERVIEW

In his classic study, Schoolteacher, Dan Lortie (1975) characterized teacher ethos as typified by norms of "conservatism, individualism, and presentism." Given these perspectives, predicated on the structures and regularities of schooling, he painted a bleak picture for the possibilities of school improvement, arguing that the recruitment and socialization process for teachers led to an orientation which was resistant to change. In the years since Lortie's work, numerous "waves" of reform have washed over schools, albeit with limited success. One of the more promising of recent efforts is that of teacher teaming in middle schools. This change recognizes that the results of schooling depend largely on the practices of teachers and that these practices are rooted in the conditions of teachers' work. By altering the organizational conditions of teachers' work, increasing professional interchange, and providing teams of teachers greater control over their work, it is hoped that improved student outcomes will result.

These efforts in middle schools is rooted in the movement for the "professionalization" of teaching—establishing structures and contexts which support greater teacher decision making authority, collegiality, and teamwork to improve the conditions of teachers' work (D. Hargreaves, 1994, Carnegie Commission, 1986, Holmes Group, 1986). Several studies have correlated the presence of these organizational factors with positive teacher attitudes and actions such as greater teacher satisfaction, improved sense of efficacy, and increased meaningfulness of their work, which in turn are related to improved teacher effectiveness (Lee, Bryk, and Smith, 1993, Little, 1990, Rosenholtz, 1989, Bryk and Driscoll, 1989, Ashton and Webb, 1986).

One attempt to create and support conditions of professional community in schools is in the organization of middle schools. Emphasizing the establishment of inter-disciplinary grade level teams with collective control over decisions affecting their classroom work, middle schools are expected to improve teachers' working conditions and, as a result, their sentiments about their work (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Specifically, teaming is expected to broaden teachers' perspectives by increasing their exposure to the practice and ideas of colleagues, involving them in decisions related to their work, and providing the opportunity to gain professional and personal support from fellow teachers. Research suggests the establishment of teams should reduce teacher isolation and in turn, confront the "conservative" norms identified by Lortie (1975). With the transition to middle schools occurring throughout the country, it is important to ask how these changes in school organization are affecting teachers and their work.

Through increased emphasis on teaming and professional community, it is expected that teachers will be exposed to different teaching strategies, increase their learning capacity, engage in reflective dialogue, de-privatize their practice, develop an improved technical culture, increase their commitment and satisfaction, and, in general, improve their teaching through the broadened perspectives collegial interaction provides. Given the limitations inherent in being an isolated teacher with little exposure to colleagues, the move to teaming seems a promising and logical response (Lortie, 1975, Little, 1988, Lieberman and Miller, 1984)

This research investigated teaming in four middle schools, referred to here as Appleton, Bowlin, Carville, and Dixford. Carville and Dixford reflected organizational conditions more closely associated with the junior high school model (having relatively distinct disciplinary boundaries, more tightly

regulated time schedules, and limited structures for teacher interaction). Appleton and Bowlin fit closer to middle school ideals (some notable features being the creation of small communities for learning, attention to grade level teams, more flexible scheduling, and increased decision making authority for teachers) (Carnegie Council, 1989). My primary purpose was to determine how the organizational conditions of school and their conception of teaming relate to teachers' sentiments about their work.

In practice, the influence of middle school teaming on teachers' thinking varies and seems strongly tied to contextual conditions. Not any grouping of teachers constitutes a team, and not all teams enjoy the benefits of professional community. Teaming, in itself, does not necessarily relate directly to teachers' own professional interests and concerns. As this research shows, regardless of their teamed situation, teachers' attention revolves around their direct work with kids. This is the essential locus of meaning for teachers. If teaming can help with this, it is valued, if not, it is another bureaucratic imposition standing in the way of their work. Simply placing teachers in teams does not necessarily assure teachers use their colleagues for working more effectively with kids. However, when the conditions support teachers working together and focusing on their work with students, this research demonstrates positive effects for teachers and, indirectly, for their students.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study follows a social organizational framework in trying to understand teachers' thinking and actions (Rosenholtz, 1989). In short, this framework proposes that people shape their beliefs and actions in concert with the structures around them. Thus, while actors create meaning through their interactions, this meaning making is framed by the particular context in which these people act. This perspective helps ground our understanding of teachers

in the context of their work environment with the constraints and opportunities it affords.

The social organizational influences affecting teachers work on two levels—the structural and the interactional. At the more basic, structural level, teachers' actions are shaped by the conditions of their work environment—the "external" parameters which frame the space of acceptable alternatives open to teachers. In schools, these conditions include time schedules, mandated curriculum, school and class size, and community expectations. These "structural" conditions serve to frame teachers' work experience and resulting attitudes, limiting the range of possible interpretations and values individuals bring to their teaching. In settings where teachers are isolated, these structural conditions may be expected to provide the primary influences on teachers' work attitudes and actions.

At the interactional level, a richer conception of social organization should be evident in more collegial settings. In professional communities, the effect of structural conditions are filtered through the meanings teachers construct in the social context of their work. In this regard, teachers' actions can best be studied by conceptualizing teaching as a "situated practice" (Liston and Zeichner, 1992, Cuban, 1984). In more collegial settings, the effect of structural conditions theoretically are filtered through the meanings teachers more actively and consciously construct in the social context of their work. The structural conditions of the collaborative school may still establish parameters which frame teachers' actions, but the values, beliefs, and perceptions teachers hold about their work are created through the interactions within the social context of the individual site. Thus, it is the mediating influence of social interaction among colleagues in the educational setting, as well as their decision making purview, which should distinguish the thinking of teachers in collegial

settings from the more individualistic and personal perspectives of those in more isolated settings.

METHODS

This study consisted of structured interviews with forty two teachers at four suburban middle schools and two weeks of participant-observation at each site to conduct "mini-ethnographies" of the "professional community" at each school. Interview questions closely followed Lortie (1975) (see appendix), seeking to elicit teachers' personal meanings about their work. Observation guidelines concentrated on interactions among faculty and administrators in both formal and informal settings. Data is analyzed by school and by team to understand how social organizational conditions relate to teacher sentiments regarding their sense of purpose, sources of rewards, collegial interaction, and attitudes towards change.

To concentrate on the impact of teaming, I chose to focus exclusively on middle schools which had adopted team principles both to permit more detailed interviews and to allow for meaningful comparisons between sites. Using purposive sampling procedures (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984), I chose two schools in each of two neighboring districts which represented similar student populations but different levels of involvement with middle school teaming.

The districts chosen for study serve predominantly affluent, Anglo suburban populations with the individual schools serving similar populations in each district (see Table 1). Reputedly having relatively less problems than more urban areas, these districts, it was felt, offered more promising sites for new organizational arrangements free from many potential distractions.

Table 1: School Profiles[1]

School	Appleton	Bowlin	Carville	Dixford
Number of Students	750	604	727	500
Non-Anglo Population	10%	8.8%	11%	9.2%
Special Ed. Students	7.5%	16%	7%	12.6%
Subsidized Lunch Recipients	11%	4.8%	14%	7.5%
Average Attendance	95.4%	95%	95%	94.6%

The analysis of interview and observational data was designed to compare the views held by teachers working in different social contexts. While I initially concentrated on comparisons between schools, it became apparent that individual teams and teachers were equally meaningful units of analysis. As a result, interviews were analyzed individually, within teams, within schools, and according to the type of team a teacher worked with. In addition, responses to individual questions were analyzed across the complete sample, looking for patterns according to the above groupings. This analysis was supplemented by observational field notes from site visits, interviews with principals at each school, and documents collected at the schools. Finally, the results of the analysis were compared to findings from Lortie's research to provide a portrait of the work lives of these academic core middle school teachers, their sentiments towards their work, and their responses to teaming.

Data Analysis

The general analysis strategy sought to follow Lortie's work, in which interview responses were coded to identify central tendencies and modal

[1]To protect the identity of participants in this research, all names used in this study, including those of the school and districts, are pseudonyms. For individual people, names have been changed, as have grade level, subject specializations, and gender except where this information is pertinent to understanding the respondent's perspective.

responses. To lend increased sophistication to this analysis, I borrowed methodologies from Spradley (1979) and Erickson (1986) in looking for common themes and/or patterns and distinctive differences between each site.

While this analysis of individual issues pointed out some differences between schools, it confirmed earlier indications of the salience of inter-team comparisons. To highlight these differences, I adopted a heuristic construct to distinguish those on "high," "middle," and "low" functioning teams. In determining these categories, teachers from the same team generally were assigned to the same group. To be considered as a member of a "high" functioning teams (henceforth referred to as "teamers"), all members of that team had to fit this portrayal. These teams were typified by having a group of teachers who met regularly (usually at least once each day), met informally between classes or after school, were responsible for a specific group of students, and clearly identified themselves and their students as a distinct "family." "Individualists," on "low" functioning teams, were those who had very irregular participation with their teams, or were members of teams they readily admitted as frustrating. Those on "individualist" oriented teams could be characterized as "middlers" if they expressed strong and repeated references supporting teaming. "Middlers" also were those on teams which, compared to teamers, less clearly identified themselves as a team, but compared to individualists, demonstrated consistent, if not overwhelming efforts to make progress as a team. This formulation was primarily intended to reflect contextual conditions of teaming, although expressed strong feelings about teaming, either positive or negative, was reason to move a teacher from one of the extremes to the middle grouping (for example, a teacher on a team that meets infrequently but who seeks out other colleagues when possible would be classified a middler instead of an individualist). Although this construct is not

strictly circumscribed, it is a useful tool for helping to look at inter-team, in addition to inter-school, differences. Without this categorization, patterns in teachers' responses can be masked by variation within schools, particularly at Bowlin and Carville where teams differ markedly from one another (Table 2). All the analyses were reformulated according to this division.

Table 2: Team Typology, Percent of Teachers

	Appleton	Bowlin	Carville	Dixford	Total (n=)
Teamers	78	50	33	0	16
Middlers	22	40	33	55	16
Individualists	0	10	33	45	10
n=	9	10	12	11	42

The different percentages of each team type at individual schools reflect the importance of context in affecting the establishment of teaming. While school structures strongly impact the development of teaming, it is apparent by the differences between teams, particularly at Bowlin and Carville, that teachers also can affect the construct of teaming. Thus, in analyzing the data, a link between schools and team type would be expected, with the trends across schools, from Appleton to Dixford, accentuated in the trends across team types, from teamers to individualists. This typology is meant to highlight these findings.

FINDINGS

Overview

The worklives of teachers in these schools differ from each other and from that of the traditionally isolated teacher portrayed by Lortie (1975) and others. Structural changes associated with middle school teaming have resulted in changed behaviors, as teacher interaction is increased and teachers are called on more to be involved in school policy decisions.

For at least some of the teachers in these middle schools, there are indications that these new institutional arrangements are related to beliefs that appear different from the conservative, individualistic norms Lortie articulated. Although these differences are not always profound, on the best functioning teams, typical of most at Appleton and a few at Bowlin and Carville, there seem to be qualitative differences that reflect glimmers of change. Teaming seems to offer these teachers a welcome opportunity to work with colleagues which, in turn, is correlated with feelings of lessened uncertainty, greater efficacy, and increased possibility to make the steps needed to improve their work with students. These teachers are more likely to accept their personal limitations, get help from others, see their colleagues as an asset in their work, and be open to change. In combination with their colleagues, these teachers feel more efficacious and are more committed to their work. Individualists tend to be more narrowly focused on their classroom work with their students, seeing little role for colleagues in their work and expressing greater antipathy to school change. Between these two extremes exists a nebulous middle group of teachers more difficult to characterize. Often times, they sound like the individualists, but they have occasional glimpses into the benefits of collegial work which can loosen them from some of the ties to their individualistic past.

The presentation of results will explicate the viewpoints held by these teachers, first looking at commonalities among teachers and then focusing on distinctions between teachers in different team circumstances.

Common Features: Rewards and Satisfactions—Attention to Students

For the teachers in this study, the overwhelming focus of their thinking is on students. At the heart of the complexity of teaching is this central focus on "kids" as the object and outcome of one's work. As one teacher explains, "All this other stuff is the garbage you put up with, but when it's time to work with

the kids, that's the fun part" (D6,M). Remarks regarding students hold the most emotional resonance, as evidenced in one veteran teacher's effusive explanation on why people teach.

> Kids. That's what I think it is. Kids are wonderful. I would rather deal with 8th graders, for the most part, than I would with adults.... You can't help but feel an excitement being around kids. You'll put up with all kinds of other stuff because of the kids. And that's the way it should be.... It's watching kids do what kids do best, which is being human. It's very uplifting to watch that. Kids are wonderful. They have all the failures of everybody, naturally, but you can see how they can overcome the failures and go on. What a wonderful thing to see. (D1,M)

Reliant on students as their primary source of rewards, teachers learn that the accomplishments of their work are variable, often beyond their control, difficult to assess, and tenuous. As one teacher comments when asked how satisfied he is with teaching, "It depends on the day you ask. There are days that I'm on top of the world and then those where I feel like maybe I'm not doing the right thing here" (C7,T). Another veteran teacher describes teaching as, "an emotional roller coaster" (D1,M). Unfortunately, many teachers don't always feel they control this ride.

Uncertainty seems to imperil the achievement of good days. As described in numerous other studies of teacher's worklives[2], underlying teachers' discussion of their work is the absence of a sense of control over student outcomes central to gaining rewards from their work. Good days often seem to just happen, dependent more on students' mood than any specific teacher action.

The root of the challenge for these teachers, like Lortie's, is their overwhelming dependence on students as their source of feedback on their work. Unfortunately, student outcomes are difficult to measure and subject to

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[2]For one of the seminal discussions of the complexity of teachers' work, see Waller (1938) and Jackson (1968).

volatile student moods largely outside of teachers' control. Nowhere are the continued uncertainties of teachers' work more apparent than when teachers are asked about assessing the quality of their work. Teachers in this study sound like Lortie's teachers, with 59% agreeing it is difficult to assess the quality of their work (Table 3).

Table 3: Is It Difficult to Assess Your Teaching?, Percent of Respondents[3]

	A'ton	B'lin	C'vill	D'ford	Team	Mid	Ind.	% of total	% in Lortie
Yes	43	60	58	40	50	47	60	51	64
Sometime	14	10	8	0	21	0	0	8	—
No	43	30	33	60	29	53	40	41	36
Total (n=)	100 (7)	100 (10)	99 (12)	100 (10)	100 (14)	100 (15)	100 (10)	100 (39)	100

When asked how they measure their effectiveness, the vast majority of teachers (88%) depend on student attitudes which are assessed primarily through informal measures such as observation, with only 43% using "objective" measures to indicate their effectiveness. Feedback from students is by far the most important measure, as one teacher explains,

> I'm much more responsive to kids' feedback than I am to administration or another teacher's feedback...because they're the ones who work with me constantly. The administration and the other teachers don't always. Not that I'm saying that they give negative feedback, but the kids are such immediate and constant feedback and so are their parents. That's my indicator. (B8,M)

Although student attitudes are not the only measure available, they are central to evaluating a teacher's effect on their student audience. Regardless of one's teaching skills, if you are not having an impact on students, you are not succeeding, as one veteran teacher notes,

[3]These are responses to Appendix A, question 21. Three teachers were inadvertently not asked this question and hence their responses are missing from this table.

> A lot of this is theater. A good teacher has got to be a good actor. The audience is what determines the performance. You can be the greatest juggler in the world and if the audience doesn't think so, it doesn't matter. And it's the same way with teaching. If the audience doesn't think you're doing it, if the stuff isn't happening, then you didn't do it. (D1,M)

Unfortunately, this reliance on student behavior and attitudes can prove unreliable. First, one's own observations can be fraught with biases, as several teachers point out.

> Objectively, scientifically, yes it is hard. We have our own biases...we don't always see what's going on in the classroom.... Personally I can be objective about my own personal evaluation reasonably, but not entirely. After all I can't see everything. I can't expect myself to be entirely honest. I want to see certain things. (B10,M)

Even when a teacher can cite student improvements, it is not easy to determine one's contribution to these accomplishments. Since the purposes teachers pursue often concern long term results for students, such as "creating life long learners," proximal indicators may not be valued. As a teacher nearing retirement notes, it takes years to get acknowledgment from students, and this does little to solve more immediate demands of the classroom,

> (I'm proud) when kids come back, high school or college kids, and tell me I made a difference. These kids are so caught up in their world at this time that they don't see that and I don't need that from them.... You have to be realistic. This is an assembly line, mass production type situation and you don't get to them all, and sometimes you get to them in ways you don't realize until they come back a year or two later or after college. (B9,M)

One's long term influence, however, is impossible to assess, as this teacher explains,

> I think it's very hard because you never know.... I've had kids that were merit scholars. I've had kids that have gone to academies...but so have a lot of other teachers. How do you know which one made the impact? Maybe we all did. Maybe I did or maybe the teacher following me. Maybe I was a negative impact, they were a positive impact. I think it's

very difficult to tell because these kids aren't developed yet, they aren't grown. (C4,M)

In short, assessing one's teaching effectiveness is fraught with difficulties, continuing to make uncertainty an inherent aspect of teachers' work. This focus on students as the object of teachers' work and as evidence of the effectiveness of their practice is understandable, but it does not solve the problems of uncertainty in teachers' work, and at times, it may exacerbate them.

Given the difficulty of measuring outcomes, teachers look for reinforcement where it is most attainable. This is often from students, with whom they spend the majority of their time. However, teachers realize that an individual cannot isolate his or her contribution to a student's growth and many effects are long term. Thus, teachers tend to rely on more proximal measures for feedback such as student behaviors and attitudes, which they can assess in their own classroom. These student attitudes serve as both a goal and outcome for teachers who link positive attitudes such as interest and engagement with the hope that this leads to other desired outcomes such as academic learning and character development. While it is possible to find individual students who appear successful in one's class, it is also often possible to find others not involved, leaving teachers unsure of their effectiveness and subject to the vicissitudes of their, and their students', mood.

While the dimensions of the attention to students shows some quantitative differences from that of Lortie's teachers, qualitatively these teachers' sense of accomplishment continues to revolve around their students. According to Lortie's analysis, this dependence on students is predicated on one's personal relations with students which thereby promotes norms of individualism. Under isolating conditions common in the schools Lortie studied, this may have been the pragmatic response to the complexity of

teachers' work. For teachers working in middle school teams, however, there are new opportunities to share with colleagues in solving some of the challenges of their work. Although teaming may not substantially alter the source of teachers' rewards and feedback (and this may well be a tribute to teachers' dedication to students), it does show signs of changing teachers' approach to serving their students which is correlated with higher morale and a refined sense of confidence for those on the best functioning teams. The following section will detail these changes.

Small Distinctions: Teachers, Teams and their Colleagues

Given that many aspects of teachers' work conditions are little changed, the consistent features in teachers' thinking are not surprising. Teachers still spend the vast majority of their time as the lone adult with a large group of students, many teaching tasks, such as grading and paperwork, can be done more efficiently alone, and teaming, at least in the schools in this study, has only been in place for three years. Despite these enduring regularities, there is evidence that teaming, at least in some cases, affords the possibility to mediate at least some of these structural contingencies and thereby confront norms of individualism and conservatism in teaching.

For those on the best functioning teams, collegial work seems to be providing professional and emotional support which helps solve some of the recurring problems faced by teachers. While colleagues may not often be mentioned as a source of rewards in one's work, for some, they can contribute to the realization of these rewards by improving one's work with students. Although teammates cannot eradicate complexity or uncertainty, in many cases, work with colleagues allows teachers to recognize the common nature of their problems, share in solutions, acknowledge their limitations, and work towards changes to improve their practice. Those on these teams express a

more realistic confidence in their work with students, are more satisfied, and show the potential to build on these collegial relations to improve their teaching effectiveness.

Good Colleagues

The most obvious difference between teachers in this study and Lortie's is the increased interaction among colleagues. In Lortie's (1975) study, he relates that "almost half (45 percent) reported they had 'no contact' with other teachers in the course of their work" (p. 193). Teachers in this research, on average, spend 3.6 hours weekly working with colleagues on academic matters and another 2.1 hours engaged in social interactions with colleagues. Teamers work with colleagues an average of 7 hours each week (12.3% of their time at work), and even individualists spend almost 4.5 hours with their fellow teachers (7.9% of their time on work).

While these quantitative differences are important, the quality of these interactions and how they vary for teachers on different teams provide a more telling contrast to Lortie's portrayal of isolated teachers. For some, notably teamers, this time with colleagues is critical to their success, as this veteran teacher relates,

> Team is essential.... It helps you as an individual to do a better job personally and with the kid. All of us have our things that we're maybe doing that isn't the best. By having a team that is willing to be open and free with each other, we're able then to take and give suggestions and I think that helps us personally. (C3,T)

Teamers see their colleagues in a different light than the others, more frequently recognizing them as assets in improving their work with students. For example, in listing qualities of good fellow teachers, most of the teamers' responses cite contributions to shared work or team harmony pertaining to students (Table 4).

Table 4: Characteristics of Good Fellow Teachers, Percent of Respondents

	A'ton	B'lin	C'vill	D'ford	Team	Mid.	Ind.
Contributes to Shared Work with Students	56	30	33	18	50	25	20
Improves Team Harmony	44	70	75	45	56	63	40
Individual Teaching Expertise	0	10	8	45	0	13	40
Non interference in own teaching	11	20	0	9	0	19	20
Nice Person Socially	0	10	0	9	6	0	10
(n=)	(9)	(10)	(12)	(11)	(16)	(16)	(10)

For teamers, good colleagues share common goals for students, have complimentary skills, and share ideas. Good teammates can ease some of the burdens of teaching by providing skills to compliment one's own, as this teacher explains,

> A good fellow teacher has to have strengths in the areas I don't feel powerful in. I think that's the beauty of working on a team. If I'm not the kind of person who can sit down one on one with a student, that there are other people on the team that can do that and let me know the results of that. (A4,T)

For middlers and individualists, there is greater emphasis on traits which allow them to work independently, or at least with the least intrusion. For individualists there is a desire for teachers who reinforce norms of individualism by demonstrating competence in their own area and not interfering with others. For a few, the best colleagues are those who are enjoyable to be with but do not intrude on one's teaching at all. Some prefer the autonomy afforded by isolation, finding it difficult to work with other adults.

Perceived benefits of teaming elucidate this orientation to collegial work(Appendix, question 26, Table 5). Teamers not only mention more benefits

of teaming (more than twice as many per person compared to individualists), they mention direct benefits to students more frequently. Teamers see their colleagues contributing to acquiring the psychic rewards they value; by getting help with teaching strategies and assistance in meeting student needs, teamers find these rewards more attainable. Colleagues make work easier by sharing in some responsibilities, but they also help provide insights and ideas which make teachers feel more effective.

Table 5: Benefits of Teaming, Percent of Respondents

	A'ton	B'lin	C'vill	D'ford	Team	Mid.	Ind.
Better Strategies	33	50	50	45	56	49	20
Better Meet Student Needs	33	50	8	0	44	13	0
Improves Curriculum/ Connections	22	30	8	18	31	19	0
Makes Work Easier/More Enjoyable	56	40	33	18	50	25	20
Increases Accountability	22	10	8	0	13	6	10
Reduces Doubt	0	10	17	0	6	6	10
Consistent Discipline	11	0	17	0	6	0	20
None/Negative	11	0	0	36	0	0	40
(n=)	(9)	(11)	(10)	(12)	(16)	(16)	(10)

Individualists, by contrast, find fewer benefits of teaming, and, in fact, several only find teaming a negative influence on their work. Teachers on less well functioning teams find few, if any, benefits of teaming in meeting student needs. Rather than assisting with the work teachers value—that which directly impacts students—teaming for these teachers serves largely a management function in which they can disseminate information, coordinate some activities, and provide for increased consistency in discipline.

Regardless of team functioning, however, teaching remains characterized by complexity and uncertainty. For at least some teachers in this study, teaming helps offer support in confronting the challenges in their work. Teachers on the better functioning teams seem more accepting of their personal limitations and the inherent variability of their work. In concert with their team, teachers see colleagues face similar challenges, often have problems with the same students, and are not superheroes without shortcomings. Likewise, teaming helps lessen the feeling that an individual must be all things to all students. One teamer comments,

> I think every person who steps in front of the classroom for the first time believes that (they can get through to every student) and it's absolutely false. You cannot and you will not and if you think that you have to, you're going to beat yourself real bad in this job. There are some kids where you never let yourself down with your work with them, but you don't hit yourself over the head with the fact that you probably won't be successful. (B1,T)

These teachers, primarily teamers, tend to see their role as part of a larger team working with students. Through a team approach, there is hope that someone will be able to succeed with each student, as this convert to teaming explains, "I think that is the reason that probably the middle school has been more enjoyable for me is that we're able to take my expertise and their expertise, we're able to put it together where we are able to meet the individual needs of the students better" (C3,T).

Working more closely with colleagues seems to mitigate some of these uncertainties inherent in teaching. The team reduces the tendency to take problems too personally, as one teacher explains,

> You have a colleague. Somebody who is experiencing the same thing you are, and that makes you feel better actually. You don't wish people to be frustrated by a kid or worrying about lesson plans, but at least you know there is someone else working just as hard. That team concept

helps because you know there are people out there that are having some frustrations but also having some good experiences like you are. (A9,T)

Relatedly, well functioning teaming correlates with a higher sense of efficacy (table 6).

Table 6: Summary of Scales[4]

	A'ton	Bowlin	C'vill	D'ford	Teamers	Mid.	Indiv.
Satisfaction (7 pt scale)	1.5[5]	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.5	2.4	1.6
Teaching Efficacy (5 pt scale)	1.6	1.7	2.2	1.6	1.6	1.9	2.1
Personal Efficacy (5 pt scale)	2.6	3.0	2.9	2.4	2.6	2.8	3.2
Success (5 pt scale)	1.4	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.3

Through teaming, teachers may feel they learn new strategies for working with their students. The benefits to these teachers are clear, as they observe,

> I think working on a team has made me a better teacher. It's made me more aware of different teaching styles and different ways to deal with certain things. It's causing me to incorporate different ideas into what I consider good teaching. (B7,T)
> I don't have to deal with those behavior issues alone. Sometimes the behavior issues would eat you alive. They'd totally deflate your teaching. Now I don't have to deal with those alone because of strategies, there's always somebody there to support you. (A1,T)

Interestingly, when evaluating their own teaching success, an opposite pattern exists across groups. Although these teachers all feel highly successful, the relative positioning suggests interaction with colleagues may raise questions about one's own abilities. As one teacher explains, "You see somebody else doing something and say, 'Oh I'm going to do something like that.' So that's a challenge" (B1,T).

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[4]On each of these scales, 1 is the highest value.

[5]This measure leaves out a single outlier who skewed this average with her dissatisfaction score of 6. Leaving out the lowest outlier at the other schools had much less effect on their average, leaving Bowlin at 1.9, Carville at 1.8, and Dixford at 1.4.

Teamers undertake the challenges of putting in the time and energy to make their team effective. In return, they gain from the strategies and insights of their fellow teachers, the skills of others which compliment their own, and the benefits of a shared sense of direction. Although this collegial work raises questions regarding one's individual abilities, it also reduces the loneliness and self-accusing feelings Lortie found in teachers forced to confront the uncertainties of teaching alone. As a result, teamers express satisfaction in feeling able, with their colleagues, to share common challenges and meet both student needs and the responsibilities of their work. Together with their colleagues, these teachers are developing a united approach to the challenges of their work, sharing in problems and solutions as they come to recognize the common nature of much of their professional lives.

CONCLUSION

Promising Potential: First Steps

Although work with colleagues occupies a relatively small part of teachers' days, it seems related to important changes in some teachers' thinking about their work. Whether this is a result of teaming or simply the fact that middle schools, with their emphasis on creating small communities for learning and empowering teachers, provides teachers a suitable forum for their to pursue their personal goals, the sentiments of these "teamers" offer a promising contrast from the conservative, individualistic norms portrayed by Lortie.

What is apparent from this study is that not any grouping of teachers constitutes a team, and not all teams achieve these expected results. In short, the conditions of teaming are important determinants of teams realizing intended benefits. Leadership, direction, interdependencies, decision making authority, and committed and cooperative participants all contribute to the development of effective teams. Although it is possible to overcome the

absence of some of these characteristics, it is clear that for the benefits of teaming to be spread throughout a school, more is needed than simply grouping teachers together and providing them with time to meet.

Little (1990a) warns, "the assumed link between increased collegial contact and improvement oriented change does not seem to be warranted,...much that passes for collegiality does not add up to much" (p. 509). She outlines a continuum to "distinguish forms of collegial relations in terms of their demands on autonomy and initiative" (p. 512). Between the extremes of largely superficial interaction of "story swapping" and more interdependent "joint work" lies a wide range of norms and behaviors by teachers. While organizations can be designed to encourage, and even require, increased teacher interaction, the results espoused by proponents of teaming do not necessarily materialize.

In all the middle schools in this study, teaming has altered the daily work lives of teachers by providing greater opportunities for interaction with their colleagues. For those on better functioning teams, and even for some in less ideal circumstances, there are indications that through collegial work, at least some of the challenges of teaching are being addressed. Rather than being beset by uncertainty, loneliness, and self-accusation, teaming seems to allow these teachers to more realistically appraise their abilities and accept their individual limitations while recognizing the shared nature of the challenges they and their colleagues face. On these better functioning teams, there are indications that groups of teachers are establishing the foundation for developing stronger links between their work and look forward to exercising increased professional control over the conditions of their craft. Most importantly, through their team and the insights and strategies they share,

these teachers feel better able to address student needs and acquire the psychic rewards they value in their work.

While these teachers enjoy the personal contact with their peers, it is the assistance of one's fellow teachers in meeting student needs that these teachers most value. In concert with colleagues, these teachers are able to answer some of the inherent questions of their work involving their definition of purposes, the limits of their personal abilities, and their potential to work effectively with students. At the same time, this openness about problems reduces teachers' loneliness and allows teachers together to seek solutions to these challenges in their work. Finally, individual teachers are freed from feeling they must "reach" every student on a personal level. Through a team, individual teacher strengths can compliment each other to ensure success with a wider range of students than would be possible alone.

Teaming also seems related to teachers' greater openness to change in schools. Gaining independence through more flexible scheduling and shared curricular decision making, teamed teachers can see the possibility for greater autonomy for a team of teachers to work independently with a group of students. Likewise, with more exposure to other teachers, individuals recognize the need to expand their repertoire of teaching strategies to reach a greater diversity of learners.

Under the right conditions, teaming appears to offer many benefits to teachers, and relatedly, to schooling. At the least, teaming reduces isolation and provides the chance for teachers to interact. For those discouraged by the traditional isolation of teaching, teaming is a welcome opportunity to access colleagues for personal and professional support. In situations where teams are given sufficient control over decisions affecting their work, all team participants are committed to working with their colleagues, and they have adequate time

and space to meet, teachers express greater satisfaction with their work, reduced uncertainty in their practice, and higher efficacy about the capacity for teachers as a group to positively impact students. Furthermore, teaming provides seeds of possibility for teachers to take increased responsibility for improving their practice through greater reflection on their work, improved learning opportunities from one's peers, and further decision making authority as teams explore the potential they have as a group to influence the conditions of their work.

Limits to Change: Obstacles and Opportunities

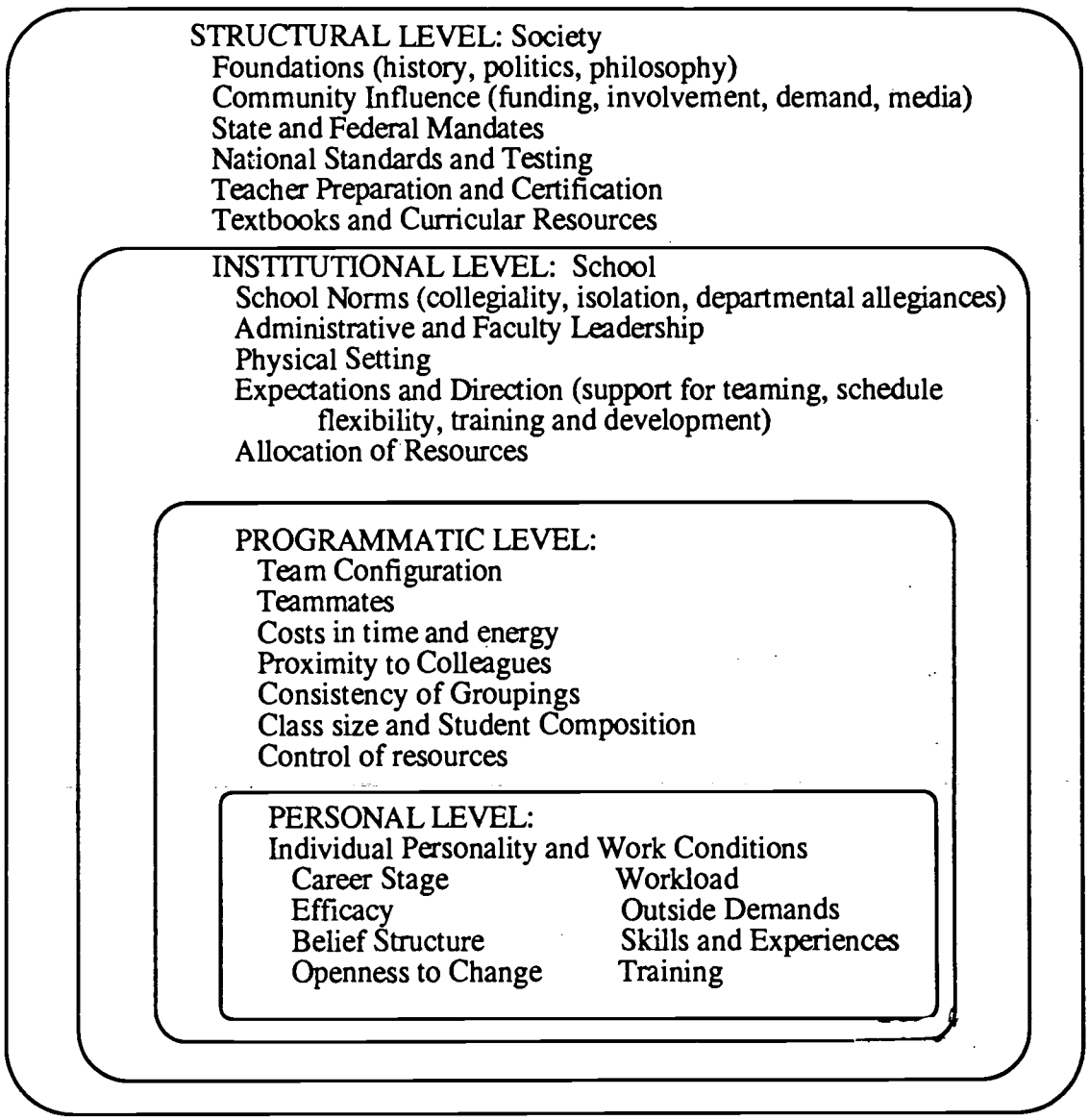
While teaming has demonstrated important results for those on the most effective teams, for many teachers on less effective teams, this organizational change has had limited benefits, and in fact, can be seen as an unwelcome distraction in their work. Above all, it must be remembered that teaming is only one, relatively recent change in what is a complex organization with well established traditions and structures. While to some degree the effects of teaming may not yet be apparent as teachers continue to adjust to these new arrangements, it seems more likely that the myriad of other influences in a teacher's work life constrains the impact teaming can have.

The limited effects of teaming for some teachers are understandable given the many structural and cultural conditions which remain constant in these schools. While there is potential for more significant impact from increased collegial interaction over time, it is unlikely teaming could produce the extensive benefits proponents exclaim in a short time. As Louis (1990) highlights, school improvement is a "wicked problem...that any single policy solution will be inadequate to address" (p. 384). Instead, new organizational structures are only part of a more complex web of reforms needed to create

more meaningful cultural change in schools. These changes, confronting long established norms, will take time, patience, and support.

To better understand the impact of teaming, it may be useful to consider teachers' work as existing within nested contexts (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1: NESTED CONTEXTS OF TEAMING



Schools are complex institutions subject to many influences. Compared to many reform efforts, teaming aims to more broadly affect several contextual layers. Consequently, teaming also requires change at multiple levels to work effectively. Most efforts to implement teaming have been directed at the programmatic and institutional levels. Although these efforts have not been consistent or comprehensive across sites, they have occurred almost exclusively at the school and classroom levels and much less at the personal or structural levels. While change is difficult to undertake under most circumstances, it is made particularly problematic when confronted by surrounding contexts which remain in place to obstruct reform efforts. The influence of these multiple contexts should be recognized in our understanding of any school improvement effort, advising against unrealistic expectations and suggesting areas to support continued efforts for reform.

Although teaming has promising potential, it is clearly not a panacea, nor is it easily put into practice. In the real world of schools, teaming takes on many forms, but common across sites is the fact that teaming must function largely within existing school structures.

Time pressures may pose the greatest challenge to teaming. In short, time spent meeting with colleagues is time away from students. For many, this is not an acceptable trade-off, as a stalwart isolationist comments in answering how his work as a teacher is affected by working on a team,

> Not improving. Taking away valuable time from my preparations and working with students. In middle school we say that our center is children, but I spend much less time with my students than I used to spend in junior high school. Something is wrong. (D3,I)

Team meetings draw teachers away from their teaching tasks with students. For many teachers, these meetings are not perceived as providing benefits for

students commensurate with the time commitment they demand. Given the time constraints inherent in their work, many teachers find this frustrating.

In addition to the demands of time, cultural norms within and outside these schools can serve as further impediments to the development of teams. Finally, the individual personality of teachers is noteworthy in their interpretation of conditions which surround them in their work. Despite the potential of teaming, under these conditions, efforts to establish increased collegial interaction through teaming may have only limited impact.

Taken together, structural forces and inadequate team development provide obstacles to the progress of teaming. Confronted with these challenges and the complex and consuming on-going work of schools, many teachers have neither the time, ability, nor motivation to make teaming work to the degree necessary to realize the benefits espoused by its proponents. When teams fall short of these ideals, and thereby fail to contribute to improved results for students, teaming can be viewed as just another mandate on teachers' time which distracts from their primary focus and which, like other reform efforts, will pass with time.

From observing the work of the better functioning teams in these schools, it is clear teaming has potential to significantly improve teachers' work lives and their work with students. In these situations, teachers are developing consistent policies for their students, learning more about "their kids" and how to work with them, feeling empowered to make decisions affecting their work, and "having fun." However, in comparison to other reforms, which have a long history of failure, teaming may be even more demanding to implement effectively. Although some structural changes have been made to support teaming, numerous important structures remain in place which undermine the development of teaming in many settings. Without more comprehensive

support for teaming throughout the school structure, the sporadic impact of teaming is likely to continue. Over time, initial support from administration, teachers and the community for what is often a challenging and costly arrangement may fade as results fall short of expectations and frustrations mount, thereby further lessening the effectiveness of teams and accordingly, the commitment to them.

Implications

In many respects, the findings of this study are not surprising. Common sense would tell us that contextual conditions will affect any reform effort and the effects of a reform will differ from person to person. Sadly, however, to generate support for change, claims are often made which surpass the realistic possibilities for isolated efforts at reform.

Especially with a reform such as teaming, which requires structural and cultural transformation, patience and continued support is necessary to begin the slow process of change. Given the glimmers of progress expressed by many teachers in this study, particularly those on the best functioning teams, it would be a mistake to abandon this promising effort. At the same time, the results of this study suggest there are steps which could facilitate the progress of teaming.

Although teaming shows promise to help moderate the complexity of teacher's work, lessen uncertainty, and increase efficacy, it certainly doesn't work for all. Even for those on the best functioning teams it does not always solve fundamental problems of their craft, and the reality of the complexities of teaching must be acknowledged.

In light of these findings, the prospects for teaming deserve reassessment. It should be noted that many of the teacher sentiments considered in this study lie at the heart of teacher thinking and thus are likely to be most slow to change. Some characteristics—pertaining to sharing with

colleagues, seeking links to other subjects, and willingness to make decisions affecting their classrooms—seem changed from what would be expected of isolated teachers. These beginning steps may serve as the foundation for more fundamental changes in teachers' thinking as teams develop.

From the comments of these teachers, it is clear that the most meaningful aspect of their job is their work with students. This worthy focus should be more directly addressed as an objective to which teaming can offer significant contributions. Reviewing literature on professional community, there seems to be a tendency to concentrate on its benefits to teachers in terms of more adult contact, increased reflection, exposure to learning opportunities, and improved status. These are all worthy outcomes of teaming that indirectly affect teachers' work with students, but the links between the labor of collegial interaction and more immediate impact on students may lack proximity for some teachers. Accordingly, direct attention to how teaming contributes to effectiveness with students is needed. As Maeroff (1993) observes,

> Team building that seems not to be sufficiently focused on the most serious needs of students runs the risk of appearing peripheral to the show being performed in the main ring. Team building in such circumstances would be little more than another sideshow, and education already has more than enough of these. (p. 519)

Those on the best functioning teams acknowledge the benefits of teaming in their work with students; they value knowing their students better, learning effective strategies, and sharing in facing challenges. Less well functioning teams less frequently address issues relating directly to their work with students. In this regard, leadership within teams or from school administration can help direct attention to these student related concerns and teams should be held accountable for these considerations. Relatedly, leadership can help set specific, achievable, even if small, goals; these small successes need to be

celebrated to help teams recognize their progress through struggles which are inherent in team work.

Organizational adaptations would help teaming work more smoothly as well. Removing some of the structural constraints on collaboration would enable teams to develop more to their full potential. A basic necessity is giving a team of teachers a consistent group of students. Opening up the schedule by giving teams control of the full day would allow greater flexibility in their use of time. Teachers could be freed from some subject based requirements related to the purchase of texts and materials as well as the pervasive influence of standardized tests. Release time could help teachers observe each other at work. In general, steps to reduce constraints on team's decision making opportunities, increase their time together to develop shared perspectives, and allow greater control over the conditions of their work are likely to help the establishment of meaningful and effective teams.

Finally, as these steps are put into effect, it should be remembered that "performance is both the cause and effect of teams" (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p. 107). As this study indicates and Little (1990) reminds us, teachers will work together to the extent they are truly interdependent. Interdependence results from having outcomes for which team members have collective responsibility. Thus, teams should work on developing clarity of goals and establishing shared performance standards to measure their progress. These objectives are essential for creating high performance teams as common purposes supersede individual preferences as the guideposts to their work. In turn, teachers working with shared performance standards begin to make the difficult step from individual accountability to mutual accountability which lies at the core of teamwork.

As teams evolve, the professional and personal benefits they provide can provide intrinsic rewards that engage and regenerate members' motivation. While fundamental change in teacher thinking may be slow in coming, the initial steps to teamed work, founded on clear performance objectives for effectiveness with students, can serve as the basis for further development of collaborative cultures in schools. It is through the persistence of these efforts that teachers will begin to exercise their potential as professionals responsible for important decisions affecting their work.

APPENDIX

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction: Purpose of study, consent form, taping approval, etc.

Demographics

1. Would you describe your position here please?
2. How many years have you taught here?
3. How many years have you been in teaching?
4. How important is it for you to teach your particular grade level or your particular subject? How painful would it be if you were required to change grade level or subject area?
5. How did you end up here at _____ Middle School?
   Did anything else attract you to this system and school?

Purposes

6. What would you say is the mission or principal goals at this school?
7. I know its not easy to state clearly, but would you try to explain to me what you try most to achieve as a teacher? What are you really trying to do most of all? (Probe here until there is a sense of whether the teacher tends towards valuing basic skills or interpersonal relationships.)
8. To what extent are you free to do (above) more or less as you think best? Are there constraints on you that limit your effectiveness? If so, what are they? (Probe here to find out what the teacher would like to be doing but cannot.)
9. What changes of any kind that occur to you would allow you to do a better job of what you are really trying to do?

Rewards

10. Every so often, teachers tell me, they have a really good day. Could you tell me what a good day is like for you? What happens? (Probe for outcomes, after general)
11. Please recall some occasions when you felt especially proud of something you achieved as a teacher. Please tell me about it> Are there other things you have experienced which have made you feel especially proud?
12. Most of us have some occasions (we hope rare) when we feel ashamed about some things we have done. What kinds of things in your teaching may have happened which you regretted having done?

Level of Involvement

13. If you were to get a gift of ten more hours a week (with the provision that it be used for work), which of the following would you choose to spend that extra time on? (Show Card)

1. School level curriculum committee
2. Private preparation
3. Public relations
4. In-class teaching
5. School operations
6. Parent conferences
7. Team planning
8. Working with a colleague
9. Counseling students

14. Since we're talking about time, I wonder if you could give me an approximate picture of how you distribute your time during an average school week? First, how much time do you spend on school premises?

How do you distribute your time between: (Card 2)

Actual classroom teaching

Direct individual prep for class such as lesson planning, setting up equipment, etc.

Interacting with fellow teachers on academic matters

Socializing with fellow teachers

Interacting with school administrators

Grading papers, etc.

Routine paper work (administrative)

Seeing individual students

Extracurricular and study halls, etc.

Serving on school committees

Other-specify

How much time, including weekends, do you spend working at home in the average week? How do you spend that time-on what tasks?

Do you spend time on school work other than at school or at home- such as meetings of professional groups or at classes, for example? If yes, how many hours? That makes a total of ----per average week. Does that sound about right?

Would you say that you work harder, about the same, or a little less than most teachers in the school? How do you think your workload compares to that of teachers in other schools?

Efficacy Measures

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
(Card 3 for both questions: 5 point agree-disagree scale)
When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most students' motivation and performance depends on their environment.

16. If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult and unmotivated students.

Satisfactions

17. We hear a lot these days about the problems teachers have, but there are over two million working at teaching in the United States. What do you think attracts and holds people in public school teaching?

18. As far as you personally are concerned, what are the really important satisfactions which you receive in your work as a teacher? (General, get as many as possible. Have the things that bring you satisfaction changed over time? Has your level of satisfaction changed over time?)

19. Of those you mentioned, which do you feel is the most important satisfaction?

20. Have you found any satisfaction in teaching which you didn't expect to find when you made up your mind to enter the field?

21. What are the major ways in which you tell whether you are doing the kind of job you want to do? What do you watch as indication of your effectiveness? (Probe: Student focus? Self focus? Is it difficult to assess your teaching? If so, why?)

22. Which of these statements comes closest to describing you feelings about teaching? (hand card 4)

1. I am extremely satisfied with teaching as my occupation.
2. I am very satisfied with teaching as my occupation.
3. I am more satisfied than not with teaching as my occupation.
4. I am equally satisfied and dissatisfied- I guess I'm in the middle.
5. I am more dissatisfied than satisfied with teaching as my occupation.
6. I am very dissatisfied with teaching as my occupation.
7. I am extremely dissatisfied with teaching as my occupation.

Can you comment on your choice?

23. Can you think of any changes-of any kind-which might increase your satisfaction with teaching as an occupation?

24. I guess no line of work is perfect. What are the things which you like least about teaching? What are the things which bother you most in your work? (Full probing)

Collegiality

25. When designing and planning classes, what considerations go into your thinking? (Probe here for focus on students, colleagues, material, etc.)

26. How much do you work with other teachers?

On what sorts of things do you work with other teachers?

What do you gain by working with other teachers? What challenges does this raise?

Would you like to do less, about the same, or more work with other teachers? Why?

27. What, in your opinion, makes a really good "fellow teacher?" How does a good fellow teacher act?

28. Whom do you turn to for instructional assistance and inspiration? Who provides you with emotional support and "strokes"? When you are having difficulty as a teacher, to whom do you go for help? What kinds of help do you get from that person? (Probe here to get a sense whether the teacher gets specific suggestions or if the relationship is more therapeutic.)

29. Who has the real power in your school? Who decides the important issues that affect what you do in the classroom? To whom are you accountable? How has your control over your own teaching changed over the course of your teaching career?
30. How would you assess your principal as a school leader and problem solver? (Probes: Goal clarity, helpful, freedom to disclose problems, active involvement in problem solving, encouragement of risks? What difference does this make to your teaching?)

Middle Schools
31. Is your work environment like the middle school you expected it to be like? How does it differ and what would you like to see changed?
32. Does the middle school organization of this school enable you to do some things that you couldn't do in a more junior high like setting? (Probe on details and constraints as well)

Change
33. Some say that our schools emphasize the traditions of our way of life and that they change very slowly. Others say that our society is changing very rapidly and that our schools should adjust to these changes and innovate constantly. Which of these two positions comes closer to expressing your view?

Schools should change slowly-1
Schools should change constantly-2
Could you tell me more about your views on this question?

34. If you had the opportunity to bring about change in our public schools, what single change would you most like to see brought about?
36. Here's a card which, in rather crude fashion, is supposed to represent your total life interests. How many of the eight sections would you say "belong" to your work as a teacher? (Show card 3: 8 sectioned pie chart)
37. If you could do it over again, would you still choose to be a teacher? If not, what occupation would you choose?
38. All in all, how would you say that you have done in teaching?

Would you say that you have enjoyed great success, some success, average success, or less-than-average success in your career as a teacher?

What went through your mind, if I may ask, as you chose one of the alternatives to my question?

Thank you for your help.

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