1 Defining the Problem: The Historical Context

ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

A good starting place for meeting any challenge is to define the problem that must be overcome. The definitions of human problems need to be placed in the context of time, place, and human needs. History frames the present context of each of these in significant ways. A logical framework, therefore, for defining the problems facing the education of students in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century is to review the historical context so that we may better understand the present. My personal vantage point for viewing the terrain of history is somewhat privileged. It is based on 15 years as a student, followed by another 52 years as a student and educator. Because my connection to formal education began in a rural, one-room schoolhouse—not very different from the way it had been in the 19th century—and continues with my present role as a teacher-educator, this personal perspective, in essence, spans 3 centuries. As a bridge builder, I believe this perspective will be useful in defining the problem and in suggesting solutions.

This chapter is not, however, intended as a complete history of education. Other whole texts do this well. It is, instead, meant to be a general and personally selective baseline for making connections to the present that I will present throughout the following chapters.

SCHOOLS AS TRANSMITTERS OF CULTURE

An astronaut returning from a 20-year sojourn in space early in 2001 might have been surprised at what seemed foremost on the minds of Americans—at

least as judged by our media and politicians. Instead of exciting reports of progress and thinking about the new frontiers of space, front-page headlines, major articles, and campaign speeches lamented the problems and deficiencies of our educational systems. Well, we do need schools to produce astronauts and scientists and, of course, politicians. Our astronaut shouldn't be too surprised. The other headlines reveal a continuing pattern of a world troubled by conflict: the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, and China, to name just a few; and as I write this book later in the same year, the threat of world terrorism has become reality as the U.S. homeland is struck by surprise with a devastating attack. Cultural differences are often the seeds of conflict.

Education is about transmitting the culture. Public education in this country is also about closing cultural gaps—gaps that many fear as potential sources of human conflict. But why all the interest at this moment in time? As soon as September 23, 2001, 12 days after the attack on this country, Congress was grappling with and making decisions on President George W. Bush's education plan (Associated Press, 2001).

On October 10, 2001, 3 days after the country's attack on Afghanistan, 16 state governors were meeting at an IBM center in Palisades, New York, for the fourth education summit. The location is about 5 minutes from where I teach, but I was not invited, and neither was a fair representation of other teachers and principals. President Bush was supposed to be there but did not appear, and neither did nine other governors who had originally agreed to come. Michigan Governor John Engler gave the rationale for their presence in these dire times, arguing that American strength can only be maintained with an educated population.

"We're in a war," he said. "We want to secure ourselves from enemies internal and external. Ignorance, lack of knowledge, poorly developed skills, these are the kind of internal enemies we can do something about" (Wilson & Weiner, 2001, p. 1B).

A major agenda for the 2001 conference was the problem of the ever-widening gap in test scores between white and minority students. The solution offered by President Bush and supported by both houses of Congress was annual tests for student in Grades 3 to 8. Many state representatives were concerned about the cost of the tests. Rhode Island's commissioner of education Peter McWalters cited a cost of $4 million and expressed concern that the expense would divert dollars from other needs. IBM chairman Lou Gerstner suggested another costly solution to the problem—increasing the salary of teachers (Steinberg, 2001).

The final legislation, passed overwhelmingly by Congress and signed by President Bush in December 2001, mandated his suggestion for federally developed tests in Grades 3 to 8 by 2005 to 2006. It also increased federal

funding for 2002 to more than $22.1 billion for America's elementary and secondary schools—a 27% increase over 2001 and a 49% increase over 2000 levels. New directions for federal dollars included funds for private tutoring and within-district school transfer rights for children in failing schools, specific recommendations for the teaching of reading, and more money for charter schools and for training teachers. Greater flexibility for schools in how federal funds are spent might even include expenditures for higher teacher salaries (www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/education/, retrieved January 19, 2002). The questions remain unanswered. Can we make our schools better with this new federal initiative and funding? Are the problems of American education as serious as the critics make them appear? Are the proposed solutions valid? What do the educators think?

History tells us that the degree of public concern with education has varied through time. As far back as the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans—and considering, as well, the carefully prescribed ritual training of youth in tribal societies—formal schooling has been the hallmark of stable human communities. It is, however, a reciprocal relationship: formal education connoting existing stability but also bearing the responsibility for maintaining it. It is not surprising, then, that in relatively peaceful times, positive public attention is drawn to how we educate our youth and to what we teach them. Interest in education grows when there are spare energies and resources to invest.

At times of stress, however, attention comes again, in response to negative evaluations of the readiness of youth to protect the future. If one generation is threatened, then the next must be prepared to survive. It is the natural order of life on our planet. In order to guarantee the survival of the species, a plant compromised by drought or disease will often use its diminishing energy to produce the best blooms just before it dies. Responding to critics of the move to national testing, in his opening remarks to the summit conference, Chairman Gerstner (2001) said, "But if you listen closely, what you hear is a pathetic willingness to sacrifice an entire generation, and deny them their shot at a better chance, a better future, and a better life" (p. 2). I am sure he was also concerned about future generations.

Philosophers Durkheim (1956/1973) and Dewey (1916/1973, p. 24) remind us of the culture-preserving tasks of education. Durkheim speaks of the need for transmission of culture, but in Dewey's frame of reference, the culture must be renewed in the process of education. Dewey thus leaves the door more open to change with each new generation. And in times of stress, it is change, not continuity of anachronistic systems, that may offer the best chance for survival. Stress within our culture has increased with the quickening pace of change resulting from globalization and new technology. We will need constant renewal. As I write these words, this country is suddenly in a state of turmoil over terrorist attacks. My frame of reference today is

different from the one in which I wrote last week. I will need to put my thoughts into a new historical context.

Popkewitz (2000), commenting on school reform that is based on research and evaluation using existing "commonsense" schooling as a frame of reference, states that this "denies change in the process of change" (p. 18). He envisions the political use of power in controlling education as social administration—an attempt to control chance happenings and their risks:

> The state was expected to shape a particular type of individual. . . . Policy was to police not only institutional development but also the construction of the "self" who could function within the new political relations of liberal democracy and capitalism. (p. 19)

An extreme example of nondemocratic social administration would be the unidirectional and unbending training of Hitler's youth in Nazi Germany—and, in deadly but far-reaching microcosm, the preparation for determined self-destruction of Osama bin Laden's terrorists. In contrast, cultural-transmission functions within our liberal democracy have traditionally included flexibility and responsiveness to the need for change. For most of our country's history, there has been freedom to adapt and experiment. Control of education in the United States is delegated by the Constitution to individual states, and many states have, in the past, delegated this power to local governments.

One explicatory theory in relation to this holds that when central governments lack power—in the form of desired resources (e.g., federal funds) or effective constraints—the central government introduces policies that increase deployable sanctions (Firestone, Fitz, & Broadfoot, 1999). Federal funding for education is minimal and, in the light of recent events that place us on a war status, not likely to be forthcoming. The new federal legislation, therefore, calls upon states to develop the tests and apply the sanction of forced reorganization to schools that do not meet the standards.

Dispersal of power, however, also allows for the voice of subcultures. At the same time that politicians are calling for tightening toward a traditional curriculum based on standards and assessments, albeit with the responsibility deployed to the states, are they forcing us to leave our tradition of freedom to adapt? Will greater conformity be helpful to our country?

WHAT EARLY 20TH-CENTURY SCHOOLS WERE LIKE

Schools in the early 20th century were not very different from those of the previous century. The instructional concepts and procedures of a one-room

rural schoolhouse were transported to urban conglomerates of classrooms where teachers functioned more or less in isolation from each other (Lortie, 1975). The age of required attendance was extended, and consolidated high schools began to offer a wider choice of subjects for students. Most children still left before high school completion to work on family farms or in the expanding factories of the cities. Except for the greater abundance of textbooks, new technology had made little difference in either the curriculum or instructional approaches. Teachers were still trained in specialized teacher-training schools rather than in universities and were mostly female. There were some experiments in response to the ideas of progressivist philosophers such as Dewey and Froebel, but their overall influence was limited and cyclic.

In 1906, Dewey follower Samuel Wirt brought a progressive education system to the city of Gary, Indiana. His system, called the Platoon School, revolved around a combination of study, play, and work. An attempt to bring the system to New York City in 1911 was perceived as an attempt to degrade education from an intellectual enterprise to preparation for work. It actually caused some riots and turned the tide of a mayoral election (Salomon, 2001).

Resurgent infusions of variants of the concepts of progressivism, throughout the 20th century, were heralded and welcomed by educators but were then quickly dispensed with when politicians, eager to find a public interest issue, disparaged the experiments in favor of traditional methods.

MY SCHOOL IN BETHEL

My own history of involvement in educational systems in the United States has been long, varied, and challenged by change. In the beginning, at the height of the 1930s depression, there was the one-room, rural schoolhouse in Bethel, New York (also the site of the original Woodstock), which I attended while living on my grandparents' farm. The school day began with a rope-pulled bell (the student-ringer enjoying a reward for work well done), the Pledge of Allegiance, a short piece from the Bible, and the singing of the unofficial, second-place national anthem of the time, "My Country 'Tis of Thee." We then discussed the date and the weather, and Mrs. Mann shared the headlines and excerpts from the previous day's newspaper with us. This was greatly appreciated because most of us did not have regular access to newspapers, and radio reception was erratic. The morning assignments, already written on the large blackboard, were reviewed, and quickly we divided into smaller groups at two long tables or remained at our desks. The desks and chairs were movable, and every afternoon, the ink monitor would fill the individual inkwells in the desk corners. A good part of the day was spent reading aloud from our readers to Mrs. Mann or to one of the older kids. On the blackboard were math examples and spelling words to copy and

use in sentences. They were organized by grade level, but we were challenged to try the harder ones. During the week, we did these on our own slates or in copybooks. Friday was test day, and the work was done on carefully counted and doled-out papers. The lined papers were folded into columns for spelling, and the unlined papers into boxes for math. Tests were returned on Monday, and we had to make the necessary corrections. We could ask Mrs. Mann or the older kids for help.

There were some textbooks that we only used in school. The textbooks were a signal for what grade we were in, but Mrs. Mann did not hesitate to move us into another grade and book at any time during the school year. I really do not remember any homework. The chores we had to do when we got home were more important. My favorite place in the schoolhouse was a little alcove with shelves of storybooks. We could read these when we finished our work, and we could take the older ones home overnight. Our school outhouse had been updated with two indoor toilets. The overhead flush tanks were filled by strokes on a lift pump, which also supplied us with drinking water. Another monitor stroked the pump regularly.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN DEPRESSION-ERA NEW YORK CITY

My rural experiences soon alternated with some very different classrooms in depression-bound New York, where my parents migrated to try to earn a living. We had very large classes of over 40 students in the same grade and sat in long rows of attached seats. The first school I attended had been built in the middle of the 19th century. There were large supporting columns in every classroom. Punishment sometimes included sitting behind a column. The toilets we visited at morning and afternoon recess were in a separate building with girls on one side and boys on the other. They were just one long wooden bench with holes in it, but water did run through.

Every morning, we lined up for inspection. The teacher greeted us and checked us individually to see that we looked healthy, had brushed our teeth, and had brought a handkerchief. She used a pencil with an eraser on the end to look at our hair to see if there were lice. Almost everyone had free lunch, and it was welcomed. There were more textbooks, and we sometimes brought one of them home for homework. The school year was divided into two parts, A and B. Students were promoted or left back at the end of January or in June. They could also skip grades. Our classroom elementary teachers taught us everything: reading, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, history, geography, music, art, and sewing. I do not remember writing anything longer than a paragraph with our spelling words. Discipline was enforced with punishments of writing

sentences about our misdeeds or, sometimes, with a smack on the palm with a wooden ruler. The schools I attended were somewhat integrated. For a short interval, I attended a school where I was a minority white student and then transferred to one where African Americans were a small minority.

In stark contrast, I had a short sojourn in the Speyer School, a Deweyan experiment in progressive education, where pursuing our own interests and understanding the world around us were supreme. We went on trips to the opera, theater, and museums; had interesting and frequent visitors; and wrote and painted pictures about what we learned. Our teachers were professors and graduate students from nearby Columbia University. I remember being impressed with how smart they were and how smart they made us feel. Best of all, I discovered, to my great surprise, that learning in school, like learning on the farm or in the store, could also be fun.

Unfortunately, I was soon back in the regular school and often bored. I never had the right place when we read aloud, because I was always thinking about what I had just read or reading ahead. The sixth grade was an exception. Mr. Nunan liked to give us all kinds of problems to solve. I remember one in particular, for which I was the only one to find a solution. A farmer had some trouble. He had a store of oil that the rats kept eating. One day, he put the oil in a bottle (for which he had no cover) and hung it from the barn rafter. The next morning, the bottle was empty, and there were no oil stains on the floor. How did the rats get at the oil? I suggested correctly that they walked along the rafter, dipped their tails into the oil, and lapped it up. I'll come back to this indirect approach in Chapter 2.

My high school was a brand-new building with the same large classes. Nevertheless, I was tracked into honors classes with some excellent teachers and less bored. We followed the prescribed New York State Regents curriculum, but I never felt that the class work was just preparation for the test. The Regents exams were combinations of short-answer, objective questions and essays; mathematics or science problems that required us to show our work; and, for foreign language, written translations. It was wartime, and education was the last thing on the public mind. Besides, going to school was a privilege to be enjoyed before going to work or war, and we all believed we were getting the very best. Success in school was entirely up to the student. My social studies teacher did adjust his curriculum to help us understand what was going on in the world. Significant history was happening every day, and our texts and what was traditionally on the Regents exam seemed less important. But he also taught us how to write a winning essay answer. Most of my homework was done between customers while sitting on a box behind the counter of my father's store, to which I traveled by city subway each day when school was finished.

I graduated before I was 16 and took the subway each day to a city college where the tuition was free. Books and bursar's fee were eight dollars a

semester. My father's business had failed, and so I had all kinds of part- and full-time jobs to pay my own expenses and help somewhat with the family budget. For a while, I had to leave college and work full-time so that there would be food on the table, but I continued my chemistry and biology majors in evening classes. With any further education unaffordable, I decided, as did so many other young women with whom I communicated, that teaching was the best choice.

EDUCATION BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

> Schools are indeed one important method of the transmission [of society] which forms the disposition of the immature: but it is only one means, and compared with other agencies, a relatively superficial means. Only as we have grasped the necessity of more fundamental and persistent modes of tuition can we make sure of placing the scholastic methods in their true context. (Dewey, 1916/1973, p. 24)

I think I had a good education and certainly respected what I had learned, but in retrospect, I learned much more outside school. Living on a farm gave me the opportunity for the real-life, hands-on experiences we try to simulate for urban students today. Every day, there was a different problem to solve: flooded field or cellar, drying wells and crops, sick animals giving less milk, a new calf to be born, chicken coops needing cleaning, snow to be cleared so that we could get to the barn. Everything was constantly measured: the height of the corn, the amount of milk from a cow and the total pails for the dairy pickup, the rows of beans, the acreage in a field, the amount of flour for the bread, the best temperature of the milk for butter or cheese, the time of sunrise and sunset (and the time between), the height of the water in the kitchen well, the height of the latest snowfall, and the bushels of apples from the best tree and the volume of cider it would make. I also wandered on my own and saw nature at work. No one had to tell me about the birds and the bees—I just watched. My sense of direction developed as I watched for familiar landmarks and the position of the sun. Most important, even at a young age, I shared in the problems and solutions, was assigned to care for specific animals, and absorbed the responsibilities.

My later city life was equally instructive. In my father's grocery store, the mathematics lessons included estimating the volume of a half-pound of butter cut with a knife from a tub or comparing the volume of a pound of sugar and a pound of flour, which we weighed out carefully from larger sacks. Estimations of how many pounds were left in the sack were also important. I added a column of figures on the grocery bag faster than anyone except my mother, who taught me her making-tens addition tricks. My dad

taught me the making-change tricks and trusted me at the register while I still had to stand on a box to reach it. The biology and human society lessons continued as I opened and cleaned the whole chickens we sold on weekends, hand-candled the eggs to make sure they weren't fertilized or blood spotted, and turned the fan on them to keep them fresh. I questioned why we sold so much dog food at a nickel a can—there weren't that many dogs around—and discovered it was a cheap protein meal for poor and hungry customers.

Again, the problem solving was constant. How many loaves of bread should we stock for the weekend? How should we arrange the cans on the shelves so that they could be accessed in relation to the demand for them and also make the best use of limited space? How can we gently ask a faithful customer to pay an ever-growing credit bill? Do we have enough to pay our own creditors? Our only refrigeration was a 6-foot icebox and a very small electric case. In the heat of summer, we constantly took temperatures, watched the ice in the icebox melt, and juggled perishable items.

When, on occasion, I was relieved of responsibility for my younger siblings or for helping in my parents' business, I explored the urban wonders on my own, gazing in awe at art and geological history in museums that were a nickel ride away; observing commerce on the waterfront and the social implications of race, poverty, and alcohol abuse on street corners. My favorite place and source of knowledge, however, was the public library. My library card was worn thin before it expired, as I devoured whatever I could.

The outside-of-school experience of children today is quite different. Greater proportions of urban living and technology have diminished many of the hands-on experiences that framed my culture. There is little opportunity to work side by side with adults as I did on the farm and in the store. However, there are still problems to solve. Some of them are, perhaps, more exigent than those I faced. There are many more resources for independent learning to choose from and greater disparity in terms of their availability for different subcultures of students. Some resources may not be good choices, and adults are not always around to offer guidance. The culture has changed. Have our expectations for schools?

SCHOOLS IN THE LATER 20TH CENTURY: A BEGINNING TEACHER

I thought about my own experiences when challenged with my first teaching assignment, an eighth-grade adjustment class in the East Harlem ghetto. I had just turned 20 and was actually recognized in a publication as one of the youngest regularly appointed teachers in the New York City schools. There was no special education in those days. Classes were, however, homogeneously

grouped according to previous grades earned by the students. There were 13 regular eighth-grade classes arranged in order of ability and then three adjustment classes. There was no prescribed curriculum—at least I wasn't given one. My only instruction from the principal was to keep my door locked and the students inside the classroom until the bell rang at the end of the 40-minute period. Because they were adjustment students, they stayed with me for at least two periods at a time. I was supposed to teach them math, science, and English. They went to another teacher for social studies and, twice a week, for physical education, art, and music. When they were away, I taught other students science.

It is often recognized that in spite of current educational trends, teachers usually teach the way they were taught. Fortunately, my memories of the Speyer School and outside-of-school learning experiences dominated, and were reinforced by, the Deweyan philosophy that prevailed in my education courses. I had a clear vision of what I wanted to do. My training in science encouraged me to experiment. Free from curriculum prescriptions and untethered by the specter of imposed tests, I knew I had to make my students want to learn. And I believed, as did Dewey (1940), that interest leads to "inner motivation" and discipline (p. 155). I began to search their interests for ways to motivate these previously unsuccessful learners. We had few textbooks, and so we began to construct our own out of the picture-filled movie magazines I noticed interested many students. Our books became pasteups of cutout pictures, pieces of accompanying printed text, and the students' own written additions of personal experience and commentary. They read these to each other and vied to inject detail and humor.

Trips outside school were discouraged and almost impossible because of the schedule. I had no science laboratory in which my students could experience some of the things I had. I brought in household items and bags of specimens from nearby Central Park or the corner grocer. The nearest water was two floors below my fifth-floor classroom, but I soon had some interested students and trusted monitors to help bring it up.

Somehow, my success as a science teacher led me to an opening as an elementary science specialist in a brand-new school with a special classroom. It was actually half a greenhouse with sinks and flats for plants and room for cages. I was in teacher heaven. This was now the early 1950s—before Sputnik, copy machines, 10-pound texts, and abundant workbooks. The country was too busy with another traditional war in Korea and the cold war with Russia to pay too much attention to the education of a giant baby-boom generation. Although we had to have weekly dive-under-the-desk atomic bomb drills, the educators were in charge.

The "project method" that grew out of Dewey's focus on experience was still in the limelight, and I was encouraged to pursue it. We grew plants and

boarded animals. We learned about interdependence when the rabbits ate our crops one day because someone forgot to close the cage door properly. The sex education lesson was easy when two of our box turtles remained locked in copulating position for hours at a time. Ideas about adaptation and evolution emerged when an elusive, escape artist garden snake slept the night in my clothes closet, then greeted me in the morning before bounding across the classroom, to the delight of my students.

We were encouraged to do developmental math. I loved it. We solved real problems, had bead frames and lima beans to compute with, and used thinking flash cards. Best of all, we constantly estimated and did mental arithmetic. We studied Greece, read Greek poetry and wrote some of our own, ate Greek food, and learned what Aristotle thought. There were standardized tests in math and reading at the end of the year, but there were no special preparatory exercises, admonitions, or anxiety. I knew my students were capable and was not concerned. They proved me right.

IQ TESTS AND REGENTS EXAMS

The critical assessment tool at the time was the intelligence quotient (IQ) test. With some yearly adjustment for unexpected performance, classes were basically homogeneously organized according to results of whole-group administrations of distally (i.e., away from those tested) produced versions of the Stanford revisions by Lewis Terman (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 1996). These were usually applied in the first grade, when they were supposedly the most valid or unaffected by schooling. The IQ test compared the measured "mental age" of the child with the chronological age. The norm or standard for mental age was determined by comparing performances on the test by sample groups, and it was supposed to measure the child's inborn ability to solve "novel" problems.

The fallacy in the "objectivity" of the test was the assumption that the test items were equally novel to each child, regardless of 6 previous years of variations in the learning experience and environment. The present consensus concerning intelligence is a compromise that accepts the presence of some innate psychological or physiological components but also recognizes the powerful influences of the environment. Current debate focuses more on the various typologies, such as Gardner's (1993), which propose multiple subsets of the construct of intelligence, and on the hierarchy of skill levels and their developmental sequence.

Essentially, a student was quickly labeled with a defined potential and set of teacher expectations. At the beginning of each year, most teachers carefully listed the students in IQ order, to get some perspective of the nature

of the class. There were also standardized achievement tests at the end of the school year but little attempt to connect these to our curriculum, and only minor connections of our students' performance on these tests to our own measures. With a few exceptions and minor rotations, the most experienced or promising teachers were rewarded with the top classes. Class sizes were somewhat modified downward for the "bottom" classes. The top classes ranged around 40 students and the bottom ones around 25.

My passion for science and need for personal growth eventually brought me to another New York City position at the high school level where I taught biology, chemistry, and earth science. During my first year, I was required to spend every preparation period observing an experienced teacher. At first, I resented this but soon appreciated the opportunity to learn. There was much less focus on the student's IQ at this level although it was on student records and occasionally was of interest as we compared it to the student's performance on the more dominant distal measure, the New York State Regents exam. I distinctly remember what we did after each Regents exam. All the teachers of the subject met in one room and graded and checked each other's papers. For the essay sections, there were intensive discussions about what would be considered a correct answer. As a beginning high school teacher, I learned so much about teaching and the curriculum content from these discussions with experienced colleagues.

The results on the exam were important to us. They provided affirmation that we were doing the right thing and guidance about what we needed to do better. Even as a proven, successful, tenured teacher, I couldn't wait to see how my students had performed. Although we sometimes questioned the items, we felt a comfortable sense of ownership. There was a state curriculum guide, developed with teacher input, that provided an outline we were supposed to follow, but we never felt pressured to teach in a certain way or exclude important additions. Some of us had also been involved at the state level in writing the questions, and sometimes we would call the state education department to protest or clarify a particular question. There was some opportunity for choice on the exam, and when we occasionally omitted a topic, our students were then directed to avoid the question on that topic.

DEFINING AND DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES

There were many minor cycles of school change in the early years, but all were internal to the educational establishment. There was little outside public interest. Sputnik added the first unusual external impetus for science education and an end to Dewey's progressive education. Public interest grew in the 1960s with the civil rights era, busing and integration issues raised by

President Kennedy, and the "great society" of President Johnson. The school in which I worked was already, as a whole, well integrated, but with differentiation of most classes into honors, Regents, and non-Regents levels. Although even the honors classes had some racial and ethnic variation, there were obvious socioeconomic imbalances. As a classroom teacher and then as a guidance counselor responsible for class placement, I fought to raise my own and students' expectations. But on more than one occasion, I found it difficult to convince a student, parent, or teacher colleague to stick with a more challenging class. Even more discouraging was urging a student to stay in school when the choice of staying in school—a school policy—also required giving up custody of her own child.

WHAT THE RESEARCH TOLD US

Ornstein (1975) cites conflicting reports in the findings of educational research. Jensen, for example, attributed the lack of minority success to genetics. Counteracting previous findings and diminishing public energies and interest in school reform was another piece of research: The 1966 Coleman report, which shared the findings of extensive, government-sponsored research, found few differences among the country's schools and determined the differences in success to be more related to socioeconomic class, home environment, and peers. Others believed differently. Jencks found genetics to be an influence, but to a lesser degree and mitigated by other factors.

In 1975, however, after reexamining data on international tests, Coleman recanted somewhat and admitted that schools and teaching variations did make a difference in science and literature but not in reading (Suter, 2000). I never believed otherwise. I was convinced that differences in educational quality were factors but that quality can come in more than one form.

PROVING MY POINT: GIVING STUDENTS CHOICES

In 1971, I began my administrative career as supervisor of a K-12 program in science and health. The country was embroiled in an unpopular war. Emulating their protesting college student brothers and sisters, our high school kids turned off education and on to alcohol and marijuana. The high school corridors reeked with the odor of grass, and the athletic field became the nightly hangout and beer bottle repository. It was a middle-income, New York, suburban school district, but only a small percentage of our students accepted the challenge of Regents-level classes. Only 40% of our students took a

third year of high school math, and only 60% of that group passed the Regents exam. College board SAT scores were slipping rapidly. There had to be a solution! Maybe we could spend the school time in a better way. Could we lure students back to learning with a variety of electives and career education, which connected school to the real world?

By 1979, we had science electives in industrial chemistry, electronics (students built their own primitive computers), biochemistry, advanced biology, and aviation. Career education experience clusters combined in-school academic content with field experiences. State grant funding enabled me to set up clusters in health services, government, media, and recreation. Our students explored nursing, medicine, law, journalism, radio broadcasting, park management, and many other careers as they worked side by side with professionals (Solomon, 1980). A simultaneous focus on higher expectations worked in tandem with this more exciting, real-life content. Ninety percent of our seniors were in science courses—even though only 1 year was required. Research evidence now tells us that allowing students some control over the learning content and process increases motivation and achievement.

We had made some inroads into the drug and alcohol problem as well. With community help, I opened an in-town center where kids could hang out and socialize without snooping parents, but also without the drugs. Parents organized alcohol-free after-prom parties, and the police department brought us Project DARE (Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education). They also set us up with a youth court and allowed our students to judge minor youth offenses in a real courtroom.

BACK TO BASICS

The reaction to peace and a new focus on preparation for life in a burgeoning economy in the 1980s foreshadowed the current emphasis on standards and tolled the final demise of progressivism. Mortimer Adler's (1982) perennialist philosophy and Paideia Proposal spoke of the "great books" and "great ideas" that form the backbone of our culture. Adler and his followers, Hirsch (1996, 2001), who spoke of cultural literacy and core knowledge, and Alan Bloom, who referred to "cultural illiteracy as the crisis of our civilization" (Webb et al., 1996), led the foray that instigated a back-to-basics movement.

I was a middle-school principal at this time in the same suburban school district. As a group of educators, my administrative colleagues and I discussed their philosophy with mixed reactions. We appreciated the canons, but from our vantage point, we saw a new generation and a changing culture that needed renewal and, perhaps, new canons. Pressure from the state, however, caused us to abandon some of the highly successful alternatives that we

had initiated in the 1970s. I was particularly disturbed that the wide choice of science and career education electives I had initiated as a science supervisor was abandoned. Most of the elective courses were replaced with the traditional Regents sequence. Instead of these choices for students, there were actions to shift the more rigorous Regents curriculum down to some eighth-grade classes so that more of the Regents-level courses and advanced-placement courses could be fit in at higher levels. Inevitably, tracking resulted, and overall enrollments in science courses were diminished.

Even my educated, middle school parents showed little interest in changing school curriculum. They rarely showed up for meetings at which curriculum was the topic of discussion. Some parents participated with teachers in the site-based management teams that were suggested at the time (this is discussed in a later paragraph) but rarely voiced strong opinions on the content of the school program. They were interested in the placement of their own children in the system, overall schedules, and issues of safety, but, generally, they wanted schools to be as much like the ones they had attended as possible.

In the cities, poverty, crime, drugs, and family dissolution widened the gaps in an increasingly diverse population. Greater local control was a suggested solution, and large city districts were decentralized. In some cities, such as Chicago, the consequences of this solution were so negative that local control was effectively abandoned. In New York City, repeating incidents of local school board corruption have caused the central board of education and its chancellor administrator to remain on constant guard. Complicating the issue, ongoing disputes between a series of incumbent chancellors and Mayors Guiliani and Bloomberg, who openly favor eliminating the central board, have created a highly volatile and unproductive atmosphere.

The attempt to solve the nation's education problems by the decentralization of power culminated in a strong effort to involve teachers and parents in site-based management. Individual school management teams were organized in our district. My own middle school management team brought us close together and generated increasing success and comfort for our teachers and students. The school that had been called "the zoo" was now the pride of the community. We actually sponsored a Pearl River Pride Day in which we engaged our students and adult volunteers in cleaning up the community. Nevertheless, the reluctance of those in power to relinquish it and the cautionary hesitation of teachers to accept responsibility for their own decisions hampered the effects of this movement. When my staff complained about the way extra classroom assignments were allocated, and I suggested to the management team that they could have the power to do the assignments, they refused to accept the responsibility for making the necessary decisions (see Chapter 7 and Solomon, 1995).

Teacher and administrative tenure is another target of reformers. Coming during a brief statewide hiatus for tenure, my first 8 years as an administrator were served without the prospect of tenure—it made little difference in my efforts. Strong protests by teacher organizations and a growing teacher shortage have curtailed momentum for this solution, but it periodically crops up.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

New laws and programs for the handicapped made us rethink our ideas on classroom organization, and all kinds of special classes were formed. Bilingual education was declared the solution to ever-increasing numbers of immigrant children. Too many students who didn't exactly fit in were tracked into these classes, forever labeled as nonachievers. Money and energy were also diverted from regular classes. Eventually, the original public acceptance for tracking was undercut by better-informed parents and by research. Research demonstrated little support for the benefits of deferring immersion into classes conducted in English. Inclusion seemed the way to go.

Confronted with newly integrated classes of students with varying abilities and simultaneous demands for meeting high standards, teachers were overwhelmed and exhausted. Differentiation of instruction was the solution for inclusion, but how can you meet the needs of every student and get them up to an imposed standard? Tomlinson (2000) suggests that teachers view differentiation not as an instructional strategy but as a philosophy that maximizes the capacity of every student. Differentiation, she contends, must be a refinement, not a substitute for high-quality curriculum. Her solution is to embed standards into the curriculum at a reasonable pace.

Technological improvements and widened access to information were heralded as major potential influences on how learning should or could happen. Films and video were followed by computers. The mimeo machine was replaced by the photocopier, and teachers and children jockeyed paper worksheets by the dozens. The final outcomes of adding computers to the classroom are still to be determined. We will address some of the possibilities for differentiation and the promise of computer technology as a possible solution to our problems in education in the chapters ahead.

Most internal efforts to transform schools in the past have been narrowly directed at specific programs, instructional strategies, or organization of the school. Sarason (1990) blamed this on the complex and intractable nature of schools and the traditional and bureaucratic power relationships within them. He accurately predicted the failure of reform that hinges only on a change in school management, the major push for teacher and parent involvement in the 1990s. In 1993, he suggested that the only possibility for true reform is

to change the preparation of teachers (Sarason, 1993). Sarason did not predict the sudden emergence of the current level of political interest in education—nor did I. Never in my personal history as student and teacher has education received so much attention and external prescription for reform.

USING HISTORY AS A DECISION BASE

History is only useful in the present decision- or problem-solving process if one reflects on it in the context of the changed elements of a new time and place. For much of the previous century, curriculum and the assessment of curriculum were nominally in the power of the individual school and classroom teacher. Repeating cycles of change alternated between a focus on the developing individual and the need to perpetuate a uniform culture. A very powerful distal standard measure, the IQ test, framed major educational decisions about individual students, teachers, and groups of learners throughout most of the century's cycles. Other distally and commercially produced standardized achievement tests were based on normed samples of students and provided some overall program-evaluating benchmarks. Each of these, however, also became an instrument for sorting and labeling students, with little attention to using it to inform instruction for individuals or as a guide for reconstructing school curriculum. Less distal (proximal would be the schools' own tests) statewide standards of curriculum and articulated assessments were comfortably accepted in states such as New York and California. A long history of implementation of these tests, and time and effort to generate local ownership, made them an integral part of the school culture.