

# *Introduction*

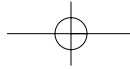
## The Social Organization of Schools

Barbara Schneider

The sociology of education continues to thrive as a field of study. Researchers, particularly those interested in educational reform, have increasingly come to recognize the importance of understanding the social context of schooling and how it affects the actions and attitudes of those who are involved in it. Whether concerned with implementing a new mathematics curriculum or adopting legislation for teacher accountability, researchers are confronted with identifying the mechanisms that can stimulate and sustain change in individuals and institutions. To identify these mechanisms, investigators typically begin by developing deep conceptions of the social context and how it operates. Relying on theories and knowledge of social systems that are time- and place-dependent, sociologists of education continue to examine the conditions that drive changes in organizations, instruction, curricula, and learning. The fifteen chapters in this volume describe how the social context of education is defined and functions today and spell out the implications of these conceptions for school reform, standards, and teacher and student accountability.

The authors in this volume forge explicit links between social context and mechanisms for change in the social structure of classrooms and schools and the consequences of those links for instruction and student learning. Several of the chapters include empirical analyses that draw on new or existing datasets; others are extended essays that highlight developments in organization theory, teacher professionalism, and social norms and the socialization of children in schools.

The chapters are organized into four thematic parts: the relationship between sociology and the study of education, teaching as a profession, the microsociology of schools and classrooms, and change in social organizations. In linking the past with the present, the authors were asked to address variations on the following questions: How has organization theory influenced the study of schools as social organizations? What properties characterize the social organization of schools? What types of experiences shape teachers and distinguish them from other professionals? How can the teaching profession become more professional? How are values and normative commitments formed, and how do they influence teacher and student actions? How do interpersonal relationships among students, teachers, and parents affect organizational learning in schools and students' cognitive and



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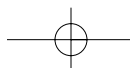
social outcomes? And finally, what are some of the mechanisms that can bring about change in classrooms and schools and improve academic performance?

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF EDUCATION

Focusing primarily on the conceptualization of schools as social systems, part I highlights the unique organizational properties of schools and the dynamic relational transactions that occur within them. In chapter 1, Charles Bidwell analyzes the relationship between the discipline of sociology and the study of education, reviewing the areas on which researchers have focused their attention, the types of problems that are being examined today, and the areas in which investigators should direct their attention in the future. Tracing the major themes in the sociology of education over the past hundred years, Bidwell argues that most sociologists and organization theorists from the 1900s to the 1950s looked at the administrative structure of the educational system, often ignoring the internal workings of the school and its place in the local community. He believes that researchers today tend to be too specialized in their approaches to educational problems and rarely understand the relationships between instructional changes in classrooms and evolving societal changes at both the national and global levels. Research can help to explain the institutional dynamics of schools by focusing on the academic and social events that students experience in classrooms and by relating these to changes in the formal organization and curricular structure of schools. Bidwell challenges conventional ideas about what drives educational change, placing a renewed emphasis on the short-term internal workings of the classroom and their effect on larger institutional changes. Working from the inside out, he underscores the importance of studying student and teacher interactions longitudinally and the effect of these interactions on teachers' and students' behaviors and attitudes.

Analysis of the microsocial dynamics of the school and classroom and socialization outcomes has a relatively long history in the sociology of education. Bidwell acknowledges the organizational concepts of classrooms identified in the work of Robert Dreeben (1970), Rebecca Barr and Dreeben (1983), Maureen Hallinan and Aage Sørensen (1983), and Adam Gamoran (1987) but criticizes investigators for failing to give adequate attention to what is taught and how teachers function in the classroom and school. By conceptualizing the classroom or school as a social system, we can see more clearly how state and national educational reforms are mediated through the power structure and activities of local actors, including teachers and students.

The conceptual underpinnings of Bidwell's proposal for a research agenda are discussed in part by W. Richard Scott in chapter 2. Scott describes how Bidwell and his colleague John Kasarda theorized the profound ways in which organizations are shaped by their environments. Beginning with reviews of earlier studies that examined the environment of organizations as relatively formal and static and centered on organizational structure, rules, and norms, Scott asserts that Bidwell



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and Kasarda recognized the importance of the institutional environment but went on to employ ecological theory to study organizational processes. In contrast to other ecological scholars who examined the populations of similar organizations competing for similar resources, Bidwell and Kasarda were concerned with a specific organization and the individuals within it. Organizations, according to Bidwell and Kasarda, consist of individuals whose activities are directed at the exchange and transformation of resources. Scott argues that Bidwell and Kasarda's perspective is "relational" in its conception. They see organizations not as independent entities but rather as interdependent with the environments in which they exist. Bidwell and Kasarda's perspective focuses not on the rules and formalized structure of the organization but on the relationships and actions of the shifting collections of individuals within it.

Scott's description of Bidwell and Kasarda's model, which stresses the importance of process over entity, and structuring over structure, complements Bidwell's recommendations for a new research agenda for schools. In his conclusion, Scott maintains that organizations are evolving into more interdependent systems that interact with and are affected by their social context and that are penetrated by their participants and changeable in their boundaries. These ideas echo those of Bidwell, who contends that researchers need to study both the interrelationships among the individuals in schools and the schools' relationship to society.

## TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

Underscoring the argument made by Bidwell in chapter 1 that the work and the workplace of teachers lie at the core of what sociologists need to consider more thoughtfully in their studies of education, part II examines the teaching profession. Three of the chapters address the question of what constitutes the "work" of teachers, the challenges of identifying the competencies of teaching in contrast to other occupations, the reasons why teaching has failed to be considered a profession, and the complexities and uncertainties that are inherent in the practice of teaching. The last chapter in this section turns to the workplace to discuss how a designed professional community of teachers can overcome some of the problems identified earlier and form strong social relationships that support change and improvements in teaching.

Robert Dreeben in chapter 3 raises the question of whether teaching is practiced with efficacy. To assess efficacy, he uses Philip Selznick's (1957, 50) idea of an organization's "distinctive competence to do a *kind* of thing," and within this frame he substitutes "occupation" for organization. Concentrating on the role of competence in an occupation—that is, the availability and employment of practical knowledge within a particular field—Dreeben argues that competence is the key concept missing in attempts to professionalize teaching. He compares competence in teaching to competence in law, engineering, and copy machine repair.

Teaching is the stepchild among occupational studies, according to Dreeben; lacking the political cachet of other types of jobs or careers, such as musician or

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physician, it has received limited systematic attention from sociologists. Describing what teachers do is difficult; conceptualizing what they do is even more difficult. Teachers work independently and have few opportunities to interact with their colleagues. The problems they face in their classrooms are usually particular and immediate, and the nature and difficulty of those problems depend on school level and student population. The occupation has little status, and teachers often have to ward off public criticism, which, while often not directed at them specifically, tends to question the legitimacy of the profession.

Dreeben takes issue with the notion of a single route to professionalism, arguing that occupations have different historical trajectories and that the meaning of professionalism differs depending on the occupation under consideration and its history. The training for becoming a teacher and the language used to describe the technical knowledge of teachers are nebulous and do not necessarily have the same meaning from one teacher to another. This lack of common meaning is related to how rarely the work of teachers is observed. Because their work is unobserved and their actions are often unrecorded, the work of teachers receives limited attention among researchers and in the teacher preparation curriculum of new recruits. As Bidwell suggests, and Dreeben underscores, what teachers do needs to be observed, analyzed, and published so that a codified knowledge about teaching as work could be generated and accumulated.

In chapter 4, Susan Moore Johnson further explores the status of teaching as a profession, connecting the impression of teachers as second-rate professionals to recent policy reports. Prior to the 1950s, teaching was seen as short-term, itinerant, and uncredentialed work taken by men as an interim step to a better job or by women who remained spinsters or taught for a short time before marrying and having children. Following the baby boom, when the demand for teachers increased, societal conditions did little to enhance the reputation of teaching. Teaching was viewed as akin to child care, subject to public funding and scrutiny, and based on a weak and contested knowledge base. Following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in the 1980s (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983), educators and policymakers increasingly came to view enhancing the professionalism of teachers as important to school improvement.

In her chapter, Johnson explains how teachers' lack of autonomy was held to be a major deterrent to improving practice. Emphasizing the importance of autonomy for teachers, the national report *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-first Century* recommended that teachers hold a bachelor's degree in the arts and sciences as a prerequisite for the study of teaching and a master's degree in teaching. A series of consortia were established to transform teaching, one of which advocated replacing teacher education courses with standards, a position that influenced the creation of the National Board for Professional Standards. Peer review of classroom performance by master or lead teachers and a greater voice for teachers in school policy decisionmaking were other reforms initiated to improve teacher professionalism. Some of these reforms have prevailed, while others, according to Johnson, have been less than successful. What reformers failed to recognize was the influence of societal changes, such as demographic shifts in the

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teaching force and limitations on state funding, on attempts to improve teacher professionalism.

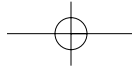
In chapter 5, Richard Ingersoll evaluates the “loose-coupling perspective” often used to characterize the organization of schools. Ingersoll notes that schools, like other organizations, have a formal hierarchy, a specialized division of labor, and a formal structure of rules and regulations. Some observers have argued that a bureaucratic structure, with its formal rules and sanctions, is not the most effective mechanism for exercising organizational control and accountability, especially in schools. Asserting that schools have more control and coordination than some analysts have assumed, Ingersoll closely examines the decisions, issues, and activities associated with the work of teachers in schools.

Consistent with Bidwell, Ingersoll asserts that teacher actions are largely determined by the social context of their schools. Cohesion and cooperation among the faculty, communication among the staff and with the parents and students, and curricular coherence are shaped in part by the teachers but also by the administrators who work in schools. These conditions are not necessarily imposed externally but rather occur through teachers’ daily interactions with others. Examinations of the social organization of teachers’ work reveal that the classroom is not a separate, inviolate zone of teacher autonomy. Rather the work of teachers is subject to considerable direct control and constraint by those with whom they interact.

In chapter 6, Adam Gamoran, Ramona Gunter, and Tona Williams use intensive case studies to demonstrate how a school district has promoted a professional community among its staff. In the Bidwell tradition, Gamoran and his colleagues have turned their attention inside the schools to examine the activities of teachers and determine the extent to which successful educational reforms are influenced by strong collegial ties focused on teaching and learning. The authors claim that relational ties help to establish a professional community in which teachers exhibit shared values, focus collectively on student learning, collaborate, engage in reflective conversations about student learning, and share their practices with one another. These ideas, which place the social psychological aspects of relationships among teachers and students at the core of school change, permeate not only chapter 6 but also many of the other chapters in this volume. Attending to the social psychological often requires that investigators use a variety of methods, some of which include social network analysis and in-depth observations and case studies.

Part of a larger study, the analysis presented in chapter 6 relies on information from a small elementary school district that draws students from both a mid-sized city and a suburb. Over the course of several years the investigators observed twenty-six professional development workshops, interviewed sixty-one teachers and fifteen administrators, and surveyed over two hundred classroom mathematics and science teachers in four elementary schools. Using a variety of analytic methods, including social network analyses and more standard forms of multivariate analysis, Gamoran and his colleagues show how a professional community can evolve and be sustained.

Monthly professional development activities, in which student work was collaboratively reviewed, helped to encourage a common technical vocabulary, infor-



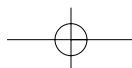
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mation sharing, trust, and norms and expectations about student performance. The relationships among the teachers asking for help seemed to function in much the same way as those among the teachers interacting within high school departments in Bidwell's research. Teachers in elementary schools are more likely to ask for help from teachers who are in the same grade level, just as teachers in high schools are more likely to interact with those in the same subject area. With respect to changing instructional practice, teachers who are highly engaged in fostering student thinking, delivering challenging content, and promoting an "equitable classroom community" tend to learn from a wide range of colleagues, whereas teachers who participate less in these types of activities learn mainly from those more involved in them than they are. Gamoran and his colleagues conclude that while these results are from only one district, it does appear that a stronger professional community can develop in this setting, though it may not be replicable in other places. Results seem to suggest that educational reforms, particularly those that are teacher-centered, may be more sustainable when activated and reinforced at the local level.

## THE MICROSOCIOLOGY OF SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS

As Scott indicates in chapter 2, social network theory is one of the most understudied areas in research on organizations, yet it is also one of the fastest growing. The chapters in part III either employ formal social network analysis or intensively examine the relational ties between individuals to demonstrate how social norms are shaped and reinforced among teachers and students. In chapter 7, Maureen Hallinan examines the social psychological processes that link school context to student socialization. The chapter begins by discussing the origin and dimensions of the normative culture of a school, which consists of the set of norms, values, and meanings that are endorsed by the significant members of a school community. A school's normative culture typically has three components: the norms governing students' academic performance, social participation, and moral behavior. These three components differ within and across schools, often reflecting the values of the teachers, administrators, and parents of the students they serve. Hallinan draws on several intensive studies of schools to illustrate the variety of normative cultures in U.S. public and private schools.

How school norms are transmitted to the students and how students respond is the second major theme of this chapter. Academic norms are communicated primarily through the curriculum, the organization of instruction, school admissions policies, written documents, verbal exchanges, rewards and punishments, and role modeling. Social participation and moral behaviors are also influenced by these factors. In the instance of social participation, social service activities, community involvement, and participation in extracurricular programs are also key components in developing norms. A student's response to the school's normative culture depends in part on that student's intellectual, social, and psychological



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needs. One school may meet a student's intellectual and psychological needs better than another school. When a student enters a new school, teachers and peers become a referent group for the student to reflect on his or her own goals and objectives and determine how to attain them. If the intellectual challenges and social relationships students experience in school fail to meet their developmental needs, they are likely to resist school norms and risk becoming alienated from their school. However, students who are motivated to comply with the rules and regulations of their school are more likely to cooperate in the learning process, be accountable for their actions, and assume responsibilities as adults.

Daniel McFarland's and Robert Petrin's chapters both investigate relational ties. In chapter 8, McFarland focuses on student networks and the influence of status, popularity, and academic performance on student participation in class. In chapter 9, Petrin explores the relationships between teacher instructional techniques and student engagement and learning in science classes. Both chapters place the dynamics of classroom interaction at the heart of their analyses; however, rather than using formal network analysis, both authors use multilevel modeling to take into account the nested qualities of educational systems. McFarland models students within classrooms; Petrin studies students within courses within schools.

Using classroom observations, surveys, and school records of tenth- and twelfth-graders in two schools, McFarland studies student participation and status within classrooms. Answering the question "What makes some classes and students more academically and/or sociably vocal than others?" McFarland finds that some classes are more vocal than others because the students are given more opportunities to interact with one another through group work and discussion. Some students are more vocal than others because they have social standing among their classmates and their physical attractiveness affords them legitimacy in activities identified as work and play. Academic status appears to have relevance in classroom academic activities but not in other domains. Popular students appear to be at the center of interactions in classrooms.

Over the course of the academic year, work activities tend to include more play activities. Students eventually socialize during classroom activities even if the tasks required by the teachers do not encourage or promote it. Sociability in classrooms, if left undirected and unmanaged, can undermine task requirements and inhibit and dissuade students from becoming involved in classroom activities. Based on these findings, McFarland calls for research on how the social organization of peer groups in classrooms influences group cohesion, motivation, and interest in work and play in school activities and how and why the relationship between academic and social status in peer groups varies across students' schooling careers.

In the next chapter, Robert Petrin is also concerned with characterizing the experiences of high school students. Instead of using a peer group approach, he adopts an organizational framework and applies recent advances in comparative statistical methods to the analysis of instructional resources in schools. Drawing on the organizational and Opportunity to Learn paradigms, Petrin argues that high school courses represent positions in the curricula that are essentially "con-

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texts within contexts” embodying teachers’ goals and mandates, school academic and professional environments, and the distribution of various material and human capital resources within schools. In examining different tenth-grade science courses, Petrin assumed that instructional resources would vary across courses within schools and that these variations would be linked to student learning and engagement, once students’ prior ability and other background characteristics had been taken into account. These assumptions regarding science courses were predicated in part on his prior research on mathematics courses, where he found that teacher-centered instruction was more likely to occur in geometry versus algebra classes and that when teachers used this instructional approach, students were more likely to be engaged and to have higher rates of learning.

Analyses are based on data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to 1994 (NELS:88–94). Petrin begins by identifying four tenth-grade science curricular positions (earth and environmental science, biology, chemistry, and physics) and constructs separate measures of student instructional experiences for each position simultaneously to determine whether they vary in systematic ways within the science curriculum. Recognizing that instructional practices are not only shaped by course content and the academic and demographic characteristics of students allocated to courses, he then examines the influence of school resources and classroom constraints on instructional experiences and student outcomes. His findings show that instructional experiences have sizable effects on student engagement and achievement in tenth-grade biology and chemistry, even after school resources, classroom constraints, teacher goals, professional beliefs, and student background characteristics are taken into account. Instruction that is teacher-centered, student-centered, or some combination of the two varies in effectiveness among students. Petrin suggests that researchers need to pay attention to students’ experiences across all positions in the curriculum instead of focusing attention on either remedial or advanced courses. The distribution and effects of instruction within and between schools, he argues, are social facts that should inform subsequent theory and research on teaching, school organization, and curricular reform.

In chapter 10, Kenneth Frank and Yong Zhao use formal social network analysis to study the implementation of computer technology over time among a group of teachers and administrators in an elementary school. They then verify these findings from the elementary school with a second cross-sectional dataset that includes several hundred teachers and administrators in nineteen elementary schools. Underlying Frank and Zhao’s research is the assumption that school actors, like members of most other social systems, organize themselves into formal units and subgroups in which relations, or ties, are concentrated. Specifically, the authors look at how interactions affect beliefs and behaviors, how identifying the structuring of interactions helps us to understand organizational decisionmaking, and what conditions influence the formation of subgroups within schools.

Focusing on technological innovations, they find that school actors’ talk about technology affects their use of it. Talk about computer technology and curriculum is concentrated in subgroups as well as in grade levels. However, technology talk



is slightly more likely to transcend the formal or organizational boundaries of grade level than is curricular talk. Finally, technology talk anticipates the formation of collegial ties, indicating that informal structures are responsive to a school's attempts to implement innovations.

## CHANGE IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Part IV concentrates on different educational reforms and their effect on existing models of organizational control at the global, national, state, and local levels. Bidwell points out in chapter 1 that one approach to understanding social change is through a globalization paradigm. He notes that while this perspective is partially compelling, it tends not to examine local situations, or at least not exhaustively. He argues that focusing on the specifications of the local mechanisms that undergird social change may provide stronger evidence of educational diffusion. Chapter 11 provides an example of how such local practices within a global frame can be studied. Catherine Rieggle-Crumb examines how girls' and boys' academic performance in mathematics and science is influenced by opportunities for participation in the home, labor force, and government in various countries. Her analyses are based on two international datasets, the United Nations Women's Indicators and Statistics Database—which allows for the study of gender stratification across forty countries and includes measures of fertility rates, availability of legal abortion, and rates of participation in both the labor force and government—and the Third International Mathematics and Science Survey.

Her results show that in countries where women have higher levels of government representation, there are smaller gender gaps in mathematics and science achievement among students in middle school. Additionally, in countries where women have greater domestic freedom and participate more in the labor force, girls are more similar to boys in terms of favorable mathematics and science attitudes. Rieggle-Crumb demonstrates how systems of national gender inequality are maintained by the connections between perceived opportunities and real outcomes. Her evidence suggests the presence of a vicious cycle whereby gender stratification in one generation is passed on to the next, creating a "dysfunctional inheritance of gender roles." It is this process that is reified globally.

Moving to the national and state levels, Christopher Swanson focuses in chapter 12 on two reform strategies that have received national attention—standards-based reforms and accountability-based reforms—and examines the extent to which states have adopted educational policies consistent with these reforms. The data for his study were obtained from state-level information published by the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the analysis employs a statistical approach known as item response theory (IRT).

His results show a lack of fit between the enactment of professional standards and standards-based reform, suggesting that standards-based reform, as it is practiced, appears to embody a narrow process-oriented model of organizational change rather than a more integrated combination of factors that encompass both

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teacher practice and curricular content. Among those states that enacted standards-based reforms, adoption typically began by establishing what students were expected to know, moved to defining the levels of mastery students were expected to exhibit with respect to content, and then attempted to align statewide testing programs with the content, using innovative assessment techniques. Although nearly all states that have adopted standards-based reforms developed curricular frameworks, fewer states have adopted performance indicators, and only a very limited number have implemented innovative assessment programs.

With respect to accountability standards, states show considerable overlap: that is, if they have adopted graduation requirements, they are also likely to have adopted assessment programs and accountability systems. These results suggest that individual policies can be viewed as largely interchangeable rather than as interdependent reforms. Levels of accountability vary across the fifty states, and the southeastern states appear to be at the vanguard of this reform movement. States with a culture of strong local control in education tend to have the lowest levels of state-led policies in the areas of standards-based or accountability reforms.

Swanson's results, which are based on two distinct approaches to educational reform, reveal that coherent reform strategies are being pursued systematically across states that share certain characteristics, such as local versus greater state control of educational policies. Researchers' explanations of prior unsuccessful educational initiatives often center on the structural fragmentation of the educational system. In contrast, policy analysts have tended to blame the failures of reforms on their design characteristics. Swanson argues that these two factors do not operate independently of one another. The loosely coupled character often attributed to movements for change in education may be the product of complex structural and governance relationships.

Chapter 13 also is concerned with state policies, in this case, variation in testing policies and its relationship to opportunities to learn, measured by course-taking in mathematics. This chapter by Chandra Muller and Kathryn Schiller examines the effects of states' strategies for raising standards and enacting accountability standards for students' academic progress on increasing enrollment in higher-level mathematics courses among students of different backgrounds and abilities. Using data from two nationally stratified longitudinal datasets—one on students, the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 to 1992, and the other on high schools, the National Longitudinal Study of Schools—the authors find that state policies are likely to have mixed effects on students' course-taking. With respect to standards, state policies have a small effect on students' mathematics course-taking in high school. The authors explain that this finding is not surprising given that the courses students take in high school are influenced by many other factors, such as school policies regarding class schedules and course prerequisites and student abilities and interests.

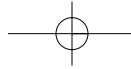
Increasing school accountability for student test performance seems to increase students' opportunities for learning, and holding schools accountable for students' learning appears to encourage more course-taking in mathematics. On average, students tend to accumulate more mathematics during their schooling ca-

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reers irrespective of the level at which they were placed as freshmen, when accountability measures are in place. However, the effect is strongest for students who took higher-level courses as freshmen. The link between freshmen course placements and accumulated course credit is stronger in states for which test performance was linked to school consequences, suggesting that formal organizational structures such as accountability measures can have consequences. However, their effects are not uniform across all student populations. State policies such as accountability measures can create complex systems that have positive benefits for everyone. But raising the floor does not necessarily give students at the bottom an extra boost that moves them closer to having educational opportunities similar to those of students who are already advantaged.

One educational problem that most young people face is the transition from elementary school to middle school or high school. The structure of the schooling system in the United States, which has most adolescents moving from their elementary or middle school into a new and more complex institution, the high school, occurs at the same time that most young people are in the developmental throes of adolescence. Marked by physical changes, growing independence and social interest, and increasing cognitive development, the transition for many teenagers to often large, competitive, impersonal high schools can be personally and intellectually difficult. In chapter 14, Kathryn Schiller takes a school-level approach and examines three different high school transition programs to learn how institutional type and geographic location are related to the type of program that is adopted. Analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 to 1992, she finds that the average number of transition programs tends to be similar across high schools. However, private schools use significantly fewer programs, and magnet schools have significantly more programs. Location also appears to matter: urban schools use more programs compared to suburban and rural schools.

Differentiating among the types of programs, Schiller finds that public neighborhood schools and choice schools (not magnets) have similar programs that emphasize efforts to coordinate with their feeder schools but give limited attention to activities that facilitate students' integration into their new schools. Magnet and vocational schools have similar programs but tend to place less emphasis on coordination programs and more on activities that involve parents. Catholic and private schools tend to emphasize the use of intensive programs in which middle school students visit high school classes and "big brother and big sister buddy programs" that link them with high school students. Following Bidwell (1965), Schiller emphasizes that the types of programs high schools adopt are shaped by their environments and by the potential problems they have in recruiting members and obtaining resources. Private schools that rely on parent support are more likely to institute programs that might be too organizationally demanding in large public high schools. In small closed communities with few feeder schools, where most students move to high school with their friends, students and parents are less likely to require intensive knowledge of high school practices. The need for information is likely to be different for students attending magnet schools, where the



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student population and school practices are likely to be dissimilar from their feeder schools.

In the last chapter, Lori Diane Hill provides an in-depth case study that shows how a school community collaborative is using a citywide reform policy to re-create itself as a more viable educational institution. Schools in communities characterized by high concentrations of poverty and high degrees of social isolation are disproportionately affected by the current crisis in public education. One approach that community leaders have taken is to try to ensure that youth in their communities have access to quality educational institutions. Hill focuses on how one grassroots organization, the Vernon Collaborative, successfully acquired more resources and facilitated urban school reform within its community.

Framing her argument using social capital theory and linking it to social trust, Hill shows how the activities of the collaborative redefined the expectations and obligations of the members of the school community and set the high school on a new path of reconstitution. Vernon High School was at one time the center of a thriving, racially segregated, but economically heterogeneous neighborhood. Over the years the high school, once seen as a place to receive a good education, came to be seen by the residents and the school system as failing. Alumni of Vernon High School and other community organizers decided that something dramatic had to be done to change the course of education at the school. They organized themselves into a collaborative that focused on reform in the classrooms. Relying on her observations and interviews, Hill describes how the collaborative worked with the teachers and students in an attempt to mobilize internal and external resources and channel them into the school. The idea that one of the most promising strategies for reforming urban schools is having local communities take an active role has been a key aspect of school reform for decades. However, what form that involvement should take has been unclear. This chapter describes a new model for community engagement that holds promise for moving reform forward.

The reciprocal relationships that link individual, institution, and context are the focus of the fifteen chapters in this volume. As Bidwell argues, the work of sociologists of education is increasingly distinguished by efforts to understand, measure, and determine the effects of social context, whether in the classroom, the high school department, the school, the community, or the government. Without considering social context, it is unlikely that scholars or policymakers will be able to design and implement reforms that result in significant societal change.

