

THE DEAL

by Gary Sykes

"A year or so before I began facing a classroom on a daily basis, I had the idea that teaching English would be a series of extended Socratic dialogues between me and my students. . . . I would lead forth my eager, responsive . . . idealistic students from the cave of adolescent mental wistfulness into the clear light of Truth upon the verdant and lush fields of literature."

So wrote Gary Cornog in *Don't Smile Until Christmas* (1970). Needless to say, he was mistaken.

Teachers have no monopoly on disappointment. Yet, in few professions does disillusionment come so quickly as in education. Teachers enter America's schools with uncommonly high ideals, and there, since the early 1960s, they have encountered an uncommonly harsh social reality.

Some teachers, undaunted by student apathy and disorder, merely redouble their efforts. Others, perhaps most these days, make certain adjustments. If they do not quit altogether, they slide away from the lofty goals that first drew them into teaching. They and their supervisors do not "fight the problem." Rather, in exchange for peace in the classroom, they settle for less and less from their students—and from themselves.

This widespread tacit accommodation, increasingly obvious to researchers but largely overlooked by outsiders, has helped to bring on the much-deplored "rising tide of mediocrity" in the nation's public schools.

Only by examining the average teacher's experience, from four years of formal education through four decades of school-room labors, can outsiders understand the maladies that afflict teaching, notably at the high school level, in the 1980s.

If there is one generalization that applies to virtually all 142,000 men and women who will enter teaching (in both public and private schools) for the first time this fall, it is that they are well meaning. They have chosen the job not for high pay or prestige (neither of which it now offers), but out of a sincere desire to help the young—to stir minds, to instill eternal values, even to act as surrogate mother, or father, to hundreds of youngsters. Many are driven by fond memories of a "special" teacher—someone who gave them their first solid dose of self-confidence or self-discipline, someone who showed them the beauty of art, literature, or logic.

In a typical group of beginning public school teachers, two-thirds (half of high school teachers and four-fifths of elementary

school teachers) are women. Nine percent are black—although 16 percent of schoolchildren are black.* Fifteen percent of public school teachers come from farm families, and 39 percent are the daughters or sons of unskilled, semi-skilled, or skilled workers. The profession has long provided a “social elevator” for children of blue-collar parents.

Academically, young teachers are an undistinguished lot. The average education major graduates from college with a cumulative grade point average of 2.72, or a B-. In 1976, the American College Testing (ACT) program compared test scores of students in 19 fields of study and found those majoring in education tied for 17th place in mathematics and occupying 14th place in English. Education majors' Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have fallen faster than those of the average high school student. Even before this long decline began in the early 1960s, teachers were not known as an especially intellectual group. A study conducted during the 1920s and '30s concluded that American teachers, on the whole, “have inferior minds.”

Such perceptions by others burden aspiring teachers at many American colleges—particularly at those “elite” institutions where academic achievement is highly regarded. In *High School* (1983), Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, cites the remarks of an Ivy League student who plans to teach: “We are under tremendous pressure all around to constantly justify our choice of a career. Professors want to know why we are taking this [career] course, and most of the other students think we are crazy.”

The curriculum of the average student majoring in education does not inspire widespread admiration. Many of his courses richly deserve the scorn they receive from classmates in more taxing fields of study. Some lessons convey information better learned on the job—how to put together an attractive bulletin board, how to set up an opaque projector. Others aim

*These statistics describe the entire teaching force, but the population of incoming teachers differs little in terms of sex or race from the population of teachers at large. However, the percentage of black teachers—which has remained stable over the past few decades while the proportion of blacks among public school students has grown—may soon begin to decline. The increasing use of competency tests to screen incoming teachers has had a disproportionate impact on minority applicants. In Florida, for example, one-third of black applicants passed a 1982 teacher licensing exam, while 90 percent of white applicants did so.

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This portrait of a harried schoolteacher at day's end, titled "School Ma'am," was created by a New York City schoolchild more than 40 years ago.

higher—at techniques of teaching or the structuring of a curriculum. But too often these lessons only belabor the obvious and shroud it in the spun sugar candy of jargon. One manual on teaching in the elementary schools notes: "A unit, or a unit of work, can be defined as a purposeful learning experience focused upon some socially significant understanding that will modify the behavior of the learner and enable him to adjust to a life situation more effectively."

To be sure, some education courses are worth the time. There is a growing body of solid research, for example, on how best to teach reading and writing. But too few professors of education "keep up," and those who provide the new knowledge spend little, if any, time preparing prospective teachers for the classroom. Rare are education programs like the one at Michigan State University, which produces both good research and a good number of teachers.*

Many education majors will never teach in the public schools. Eighty-five percent will seek such jobs, attracted in part

*Education courses fall into two categories: "foundations" courses, which cover the legal, social, philosophical, or historical context of education, and "methods" courses. Students aiming for a high school teaching job usually satisfy degree requirements in their specialty—say, history or math—and allot many of their "elective" hours to education courses. Those headed into the elementary schools divide their "major" courses about fifty-fifty between education courses and a broad array of basic courses in math, reading, English, science, and history.

by the traditional security and long vacations that teaching offers. Only three-fourths of those will be hired. What it takes to be hired depends on many things—whether, for example, the job is sought at one of the nation's 2,134 urban public high schools, one of its 6,200 suburban high schools, or one of its (generally smaller) 9,721 rural high schools. If the district is large and urban, the applicant may have to traverse a bureaucratic maze: an interview with a personnel officer, a battery of tests administered by a consulting firm, and then more interviews—with a principal, a school superintendent, a committee of teachers. At a suburban or rural school, a college transcript, a few written recommendations, and a chat with the principal may suffice.

Whatever the process, the candidate's academic ability is not likely to loom large in it. Most studies indicate that applicants scoring high on standardized exams are no more likely to land a job than are low scorers. And they may be *less* likely. A nationwide study found that those education majors who *did not* find teaching positions in 1976 scored higher on four of five basic skills tests than those who did.

Waving at Passing Cars

If superior intellect does not help the candidate, then on what basis *are* teachers hired? What counts is the way they dress and talk; their sense of humor and of duty; and dozens of other unquantifiable indicators of how they will handle students, cope with daily chores, and get along with teachers and administrators. Like government bureaucrats and corporate executives, school principals, white or black, Northern or Southern, hire people they "feel good" about; they want employees who will "fit in," who will follow the rules, written or unwritten.

Even so, teaching is not a team endeavor. From his first day, the beginner is on his own.

Standing at the front of the class, concealing a bit of nervousness, he evaluates his young charges. He will likely be struck by their sheer diversity—a diversity not found in the classroom 25 years ago. In a matter of decades, we have desegregated our schools, introduced handicapped children into the classroom, and, in many districts, decided that pregnant teenagers and unwed mothers should stay in school. New immigrants from Mexico, the Caribbean, and East Asia have poured into the country. Roughly one-quarter of all public school students are members of minority groups. In Mississippi, Texas, and California, more than two-fifths are. Some ethnic politicians, concerned about preserving their "cultural heritage," insist that

immigrant children be taught in their native language while learning to speak English.*

The students are diverse in another sense as well—in terms of their eagerness to learn. A sizable number of them seem dedicated to the avoidance of work. Echoing widespread complaints, a seventh-grade teacher in Missouri last year wrote a letter to the *Joplin Globe* reporting that “children now come to school with two . . . ingrained notions: Society owes them something, and hard work plays no role in modern life.” Teachers complain about this attitude not just because “force-feeding” knowledge to restless teenagers is difficult, but also because idle students are likely to distract others who would like to learn (or, at least, would not mind doing so).

For the teacher, the first day in class is crucial. Inevitably, several youths will seek to test his tolerance of disruption. Having measured it, they will push him to the limit routinely. In *Don't Smile Until Christmas*, Wylie Crawford describes a high school class in which he began the semester overlooking the transgressions of a few youths who sat on tables instead of in chairs, and occasionally gazed out the window. Before long, some were sprawled out on tables and others were waving at passing cars. “As far as the students were concerned, the testing period was already over, and they had won the game. I was going to be a pushover. And, since the other students had been watching the events of the first month, my list of offenders got longer as my blood pressure got higher.”

Imposing Order

In frontier days, new male teachers sometimes faced a *physical* test during the opening weeks of the school year: They had to fight the biggest boy in class to earn respect. Unhappily, today's teachers, male or female, find themselves not much better off: More than 35 percent of them report feeling *unsafe* on the job. And even when the ritual testing of a teacher's mettle is a contest of will and not of might, it is a more demanding encounter than it was 30 years ago. In both cities and suburbs, veteran educators are nearly unanimous in testifying to the erosion over the past several decades of student civility and obedience.

Students are not the only cause of classroom disruption. Loudspeaker announcements, pep rallies and assemblies, bits of administrative paperwork—such chronic interruptions wreck

*This insistence on bilingual education is notable among Hispanics. Asian families are more likely to accept—indeed, to insist on—“total immersion” in English. Possibly as a result, Asian immigrants, as a group, make faster economic gains than do their Hispanic counterparts.

carefully planned lessons. One study found that 12 of the 57 minutes in the average high school classroom "hour" are taken up by administrative routine. As educational consultant Jerry Kaiser noted in his 1981 paper, "Sources of Stress in Teaching," "Teaching itself is not stressful—it's everything that gets in the way of teaching."

By the end of the first week of school, particularly high school, the beginning teacher understands the primary challenge: Impose order in the face of systematic disturbance. Then teach 20, 30, even 40 students—in spite of the fact that many of them do not want to learn.*

Striking a Bargain

The natural source of advice on how to perform such feats would seem to be other teachers. Here, however, the neophyte is in for a rude awakening. He rarely has a chance to talk to his colleagues; when "break" period finally comes, he finds that "shop talk" is frowned upon amid the cigarette smoke in the faculty lounge. Teachers cherish their autonomy. Each deals with classroom problems in his own way and prefers not to subject his idiosyncratic methods to discussion or inspection by others.

As time goes on, the newcomer may be lucky enough to find one or more "mentors" who will disclose the tricks of the trade. If so, he can ask them what to do about a 180-pound "boy" who not only hates to work, but ostentatiously refuses to do so; about teenagers who are afraid to display interest in a serious subject lest their peers shun them; about students who sincerely want to learn but simply cannot keep up with the class.

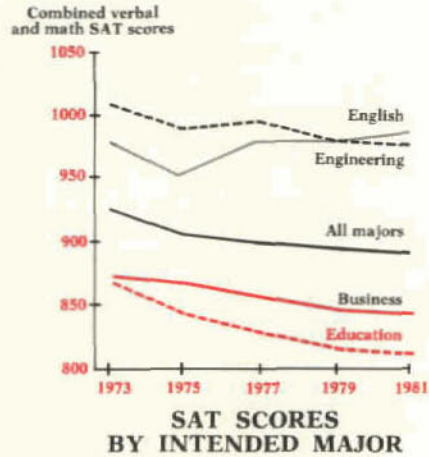
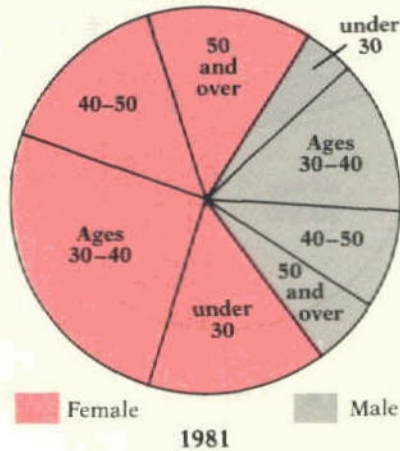
The old pro's answers to questions on such matters may not be inspiring. Particularly in high schools, where adolescent students are formidably strong in will and body, many teachers have resorted to what is widely known as "the deal."

The deal comes in several forms. At one level, it is a bargain struck between a teacher and one, or a few, students with a special penchant for disruption. The essence of the pact: "You don't bother me, and I won't bother you. You can do only token work. You can spend the hour daydreaming. But do so quietly. So long as you stifle your heartfelt desire to spread disorder, I will give you a passing grade."

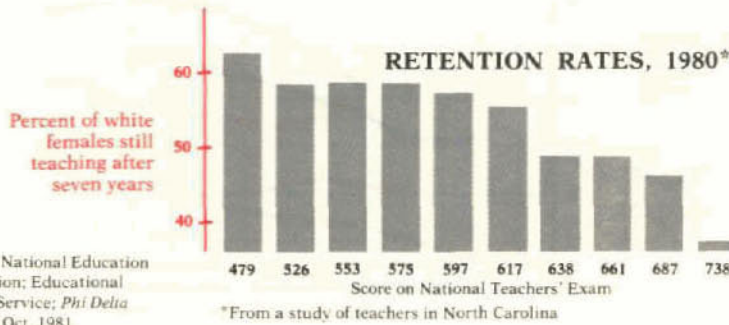
Sometimes the deal is struck with an entire class. Consider this first-hand account, presented in Linda M. McNeil's 1982

*Research on the effect of class size on learning has yielded differing conclusions. Administrators tend to cite studies showing little or no effect. Teachers tend to cite studies showing that student achievement drops as class size grows—although the effect becomes marginal once class size exceeds 30.

WHO THE TEACHERS ARE
By sex and age



Enrollment declines have reduced demand for teachers. Only 19 percent of teachers are under 30 (above left), down from 34 percent in 1966. Partly in response, the number of prospective teachers has dropped. So have their SAT scores—even faster than the national average (above right).

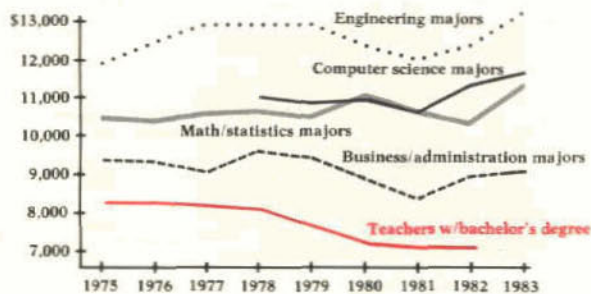


Source: National Education Association; Educational Testing Service; Phi Delta Kappan, Oct. 1981.

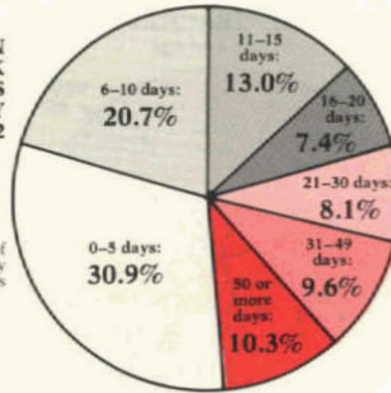
*From a study of teachers in North Carolina

The most academically able teachers are least likely to continue teaching (above). One reason: salaries are low and have fallen in real terms (right).

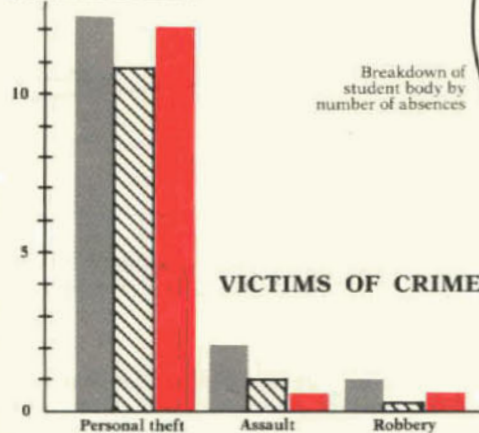
STARTING SALARIES FOR COLLEGE GRADUATES, IN 1975 DOLLARS



TRUANCY IN NEW YORK HIGH SCHOOLS DURING A 90-DAY SEMESTER, 1982

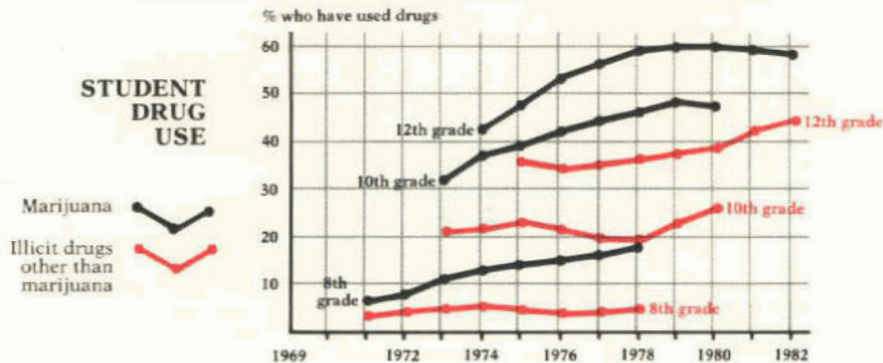


% victimized in a month

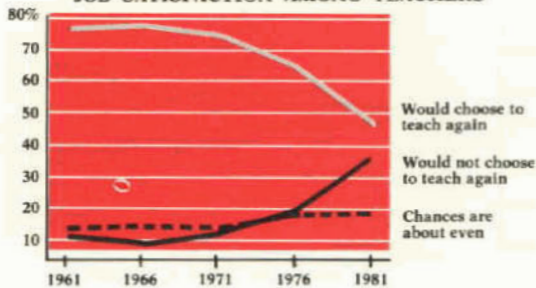


VICTIMS OF CRIME IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1976

STUDENT DRUG USE



JOB SATISFACTION AMONG TEACHERS



Student marijuana use has leveled off, but use of harder drugs has not (above). Drug abuse—and crimes against person and property (upper left)—partly explain teacher discontent, which began rising in the late 1960s (left).

Source: New York City Board of Education; National Institute of Education; National Education Association.

study, *Contradictions of Control*, of how the subject of economics was introduced in a high school class: "Just announcing the topic makes students think they will have to do some work. The teacher gets them to cooperate without resisting by promising that indeed the study of this topic will require no commitment of effort, and little time on their part." McNeil calls this tactic "defensive simplification." A 1983 study cites the following remarks by teachers, overheard by researchers in various schools: "I'll write on the blackboard what you need to know"; "Helium, we won't worry about that"; and "Don't worry, we won't have any hard problems on the test."

The deal, a by-product of the tumult of the 1960s and 1970s, seems to make life simpler for all concerned. Multiple-choice tests, for example, are easier both to study for and to grade than essay exams. Thus, teachers and students alike can spend their after-school hours free from the exertion of focused thought. The average high school sophomore does 3.9 hours of homework per week—the typical senior only 3.7 hours.

Keeping Up the ADA

In many high schools, principals and administrators reinforce dereliction of the teacher's duty by insisting on peace but not on learning. The principal's office, after all, is today deluged with paperwork—preparing reports to higher authority, keeping track of federal and state dollars, teacher assignments, pupil absences. Disciplining students is not a welcome addition to this list. In most schools, new teachers soon learn that dispatching unruly children "to the office"—a traditional threat that can be an effective peacemaker so long as it is credible—is frowned on by the administration. And if it cannot be carried out, the threat is not credible. Hence, many teachers feel that they have no choice but to seek a "negotiated order" with their students, even if it turns the classroom into a virtual day-care center. Boyer recounts the words of a teacher in a school where aspirations had fallen to a low level: "The goal, I guess, is to keep things quiet and have kids come to school and get their ADA (average daily attendance) . . . and to get through the year."

There is another reason why administrators allow learning to be sacrificed in the name of order: Some have no great reverence for intellectual pursuits. Many of them, after all, did not enter the business of education to teach *academic* subjects. One 1978 study found that 35 percent of high school principals had previously been high school athletic directors. Moreover, academic rigor often means that not all students pass muster. Even

POWER SHIFTS

In British classrooms, corporal punishment (for boys) is an old tradition; in Sweden, it is a felony. In some French public schools, pupils must wear uniforms; in Norway, they may wear what they wish. In the United States, student councils may run the senior prom; in Denmark, they sometimes run the school.

The rights, privileges, and responsibilities of pupils, teachers, parents, and school administrators vary from country to country. But the trend in recent years throughout the industrialized West is striking: Schools are becoming more and more permissive. Administrators, in turn, are losing authority over both students and teachers.

Abroad, this trend is mainly the work of legislators and centralized ministries of education. In America, the courts are primarily responsible. Thanks to a string of civil liberties rulings since 1965, writes Columbia's Diane Ravitch, "almost no area of administrative discretion has been left untouched."

The biggest winners, at least in court, have been the young. Outside the schoolroom, children have increasingly been able to slip the leash. They have sued their parents for "divorce"—and won. They can buy birth control pills without their parents' knowledge. In most states, they can undergo an abortion without their parents' consent. And ever since *West Virginia v. Barnette* (1943)—when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students could not be compelled to salute the flag—they have gradually acquired a broad array of First Amendment rights in the classroom. As Justice Abe Fortas put it in a landmark 1969 opinion (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*), students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech and expression at the schoolhouse gate."

Tinker involved a group of students who wore black armbands in class to protest the Vietnam War. Unless behavior "materially and substantially" disrupts classroom activities, students today may also speak out against school policies, criticize teachers and principals, publish underground newspapers, and (in most states) wear their hair and clothes as they please. Adults who violate these rights, the Supreme Court has ruled, can be held liable for damages.

What students have gained at the expense of teachers, teachers have gained at the expense of principals and school boards. In *Pickering v. Board of Education* (1968), the Supreme Court ruled that an Illinois high school teacher could not be fired for writing in a local newspaper that taxpayers "were really taken to the cleaners" by the local school board. Two years later, a federal court in Alabama de-

a modest pupil failure rate does not reflect well on the principal. Perfunctory "social" promotion of students, ready or not, from one grade to the next is thus encouraged—another costly deal.

Even fellow faculty members often do not place a premium on teaching children; rather, they value *trying* to teach chil-

cided that a high school teacher could not be dismissed for requiring her students to read Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Welcome to the Monkey House*, even though the principal considered it "literary garbage." Academic freedom, wrote Judge Frank Johnson, is "fundamental to a democratic society."

Teachers today also enjoy more leeway in their private lives. They can no longer be fired for getting married or pregnant, or for being fat. They are unlikely to lose their jobs for "immoral conduct" unless it clearly relates to their professional duties. In *Morrison v. State Board of Education* (1969), for example, the California Supreme Court reinstated a teacher who had been fired for engaging in a brief homosexual affair (with another teacher).

Needless to say, school administrators no longer rule the roost. They cannot require students to participate in religious exercises or junior ROTC, lower a student's grade for misbehavior, or suspend a student from school without a hearing. Former Boston school superintendent Robert Wood observes that administrators today cannot act without "looking nervously over their shoulders and conjecturing mostly about 'what the court will do next.'"

Yet, on a few issues, the judges have held the line. They have, for example, rejected students' attempts to sue schools for "educational malpractice." The U.S. Supreme Court has also left teachers and administrators free to search students' lockers for drugs or stolen goods and to employ corporal punishment—even when parents object. Forty-six states and most local school districts still permit teachers or principals to tweak ears and rap knuckles.

Whatever the incremental gains and losses on specific issues among the parties involved, the net effect is clear: Educators have less room to exercise their judgment in day-to-day affairs. "Administration by rule," RAND social scientist Arthur Wise notes, has increasingly supplanted "administration by persons"—a bureaucratic development, he adds, that ill suits "the reality of classroom life."



dren—spending time with slow learners, sponsoring extracurricular activities, staying late grading papers. Teachers who get an "A" for effort are well thought of—by both their students and their colleagues—even if they merit a "D" for their success in imparting knowledge.

One reason for this apparent contradiction is that it is difficult to determine when teachers are "succeeding" with children. Therein lies one of the central frustrations of the trade.*

Of course, those few teachers who remove all doubt as to their effectiveness will not become pariahs as a result. The "hard" teacher, who piles on the homework and makes true mastery of a subject a prerequisite for a good grade, will be highly regarded by his colleagues. Yet, the earnest, if less effective, teacher is also well respected—as is the teacher who, for *whatever* reason, is popular with his students.

Why are rigor and academic excellence not the *overriding* criteria by which teachers judge one another? Nobody knows for sure. The answer may lie in the kinds of people who want to be teachers; they are generally kind-hearted, and some may simply be *too* kind-hearted. Or it may be that administrators unwittingly screen out the more scholarly or zealous among the job applicants. Perhaps the root of the problem is the general lack of respect for demanding intellectual endeavor that, if the truth be told, pervades our society, including the educators. Whatever the reason, the fact is that the social pressures surrounding teachers in the 1980s often militate against good work.

No Excitement

As a teacher's first year in school draws to a close, the gulf between expectation and reality is all too apparent. Answering the questions of inquisitive students, mediating fervent class debates—these images lured many teachers into the profession, but for most they have remained images only.

Researchers for the 1983 study *A Place Called School* found that teachers spend less than three percent of their class time giving students "corrective feedback." They also noted a general lack of emotion in most classrooms. Laughter, enthusiasm, and such positive expressions from teachers and students as "You did a good job" or "This is interesting" were seldom heard. Even *negative* emotional expressions—"That was stupid," or "Go sit in the corner"—were rare. Whether a flat, somber atmosphere necessarily makes for bad education is debatable; but certainly many teachers entered the profession with a different vision of life in the classroom.

*The growing emphasis on standardized test scores has not roused the enthusiasm of teachers. While most consider the scores to be valid indicators of achievement in some areas, such as reading and mathematics, many feel that the tests do not accurately measure "higher order" skills such as interpretation and analysis. They worry that, because of the attention given to test scores by newspapers and the public, administrators will become so preoccupied with imparting basic "how-to" skills that more subtle intellectual habits will not be instilled in the young.

“Breakthroughs”—sudden flashes of interest from students whom other teachers have failed to reach—do occur, but rarely. So it is with the “good” classes: They exist, but not in abundance. Perhaps a few graduates will someday return to express gratitude, but not many. It is these intangible rewards, which are in such short supply, that are most treasured by teachers.

Thus, between 10 and 20 percent of teachers typically call it quits after one year on the job. In one extreme case, researchers found that two-fifths of the teachers who entered St. Louis public schools during the 1968–69 school year did not return for a second year.

Most remain on the job—perhaps because the profession does make good on *some* of its promises. Yet even these rewards often turn out to be double-edged swords.

46 Hours a Week

One such reward is the day-to-day freedom granted to teachers. Once they close the classroom door, how they teach is their business. They can use filmstrips, debates, or high drama to drive their lessons home. There are no superiors looking over their shoulder—and no peers, either.*

But sometimes a bit more oversight—or at least collegiality—would be welcome. In a survey conducted for a 1982 study of teacher “burnout,” 62 percent of teachers in suburban schools said they had never or rarely received support or encouragement from their principals, and 60 percent had never or rarely felt a “sense of community” among the faculty and administration. In urban schools, the figures were 77 percent and 69 percent. In *Schoolteacher*, Dan Lortie recalls a grade school teacher’s lament: “Lots of times you wonder. The principal never comes to see you. . . . You never see some of the other teachers. And you wonder, well, what do they think of you—are you doing a good job?”

To add to the frustration, the freedom that teachers enjoy has well-defined limits. How they teach is their business. But *what* they teach is determined, at least in a broad sense, by the state and by local school boards. Teachers can choose supplementary materials, but not basic textbooks.

The work calendar that seemed to offer so much time for va-

*The working conditions of “autonomy and equality” developed in response to the facts of the teacher labor market: Education has long been a profession of high turnover, providing, according to the stereotype, intermittent employment for women and temporary employment for men (or, as educator Willard Waller wrote fifty years ago, “unmarriageable women and unmarketable men”). So a faculty consisting of interchangeable—and not interdependent—parts made sense from the point of view of administrators.

TEACHERS, UNIONS, AND POLITICS

During the 1982–83 school year, under the auspices of the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers, 56,000 teachers went on strike in 106 school districts across the country. The education of 895,000 students was disrupted, in some cases for as long as three months. This was not an unusual year.

But the nation's two teachers' unions—to which more than 95 percent of America's 2.1 million public school teachers belong—do more than lead strikes. Both influence what is taught in the schools, and both are active in state and national politics. They lobby for and against education bills, contribute to political campaigns at every level, and marshal thousands of field workers—who have brains, energy, and spare time—to help get out the vote for favored candidates for public office. Most noticeably, the NEA, now led by high school teacher Mary Hatwood Futrell, routinely wages ideological crusades having little, if anything, to do with education.

The NEA, which now has 1.7 million members (not all of them teachers), was founded in 1857 as the National Teachers' Association, an elite fraternity of teachers and administrators devoted to bringing education to the masses. During the 1900s, it evolved into a full-fledged labor union—in fact, if not in name. As the association became more militant in the 1960s, it also expanded its agenda. In 1981, for example, the NEA co-sponsored a protest demonstration near Three Mile Island against nuclear power. Its spokesmen have opposed development of the MX missile. And some of its "education" publications have drawn fire for their strong political flavor.

An NEA curriculum guide on the Ku Klux Klan, prepared in the late 1970s, tells teachers that "the Klan is only the tip of the iceberg, the most visible and obvious manifestation of the entrenched racism in our society." An implicitly pro-nuclear freeze instructional kit ("Choices: A Unit on Conflict and Nuclear War") was labeled "political indoctrination" by the *Washington Post*.

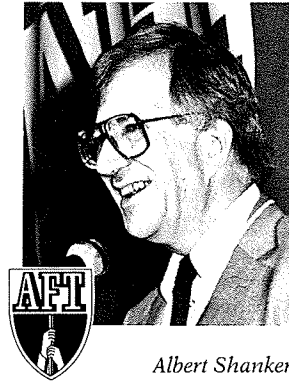


Mary Hatwood Futrell

The rival AFT, formed in 1916 by the merger of four small midwestern teachers' organizations, was a labor union from the beginning. Led today by Albert Shanker, it represents teachers in New York, Chicago, and other big cities. The AFT, a 580,000-member AFL-CIO affiliate, takes a liberal stand on many domestic issues. But, compared to the NEA, it seems staunchly middle-of-the-road, even "traditional," on many school matters.

Where the NEA supports federally-mandated bilingual education, Shanker's union believes that state and local

governments should be free to decide how to teach non-English-speaking children. The NEA opposes the "misuse" of standardized tests for students—and considers "misuse" roughly equivalent to "use." Former NEA executive director Terry Herndon compared the Princeton-based Educational Testing Service, which administers the SAT tests, to "armaments manufacturers who say, 'Guns don't kill, people do.'" The association leadership is also against minimum competency tests for teachers. The AFT sees a place for standardized exams both in evaluating students and in screening new teachers. So clear are the contrasts between the two unions that Edward B. Fiske, education editor of the *New York Times*, has suggested that the AFT "would probably consider coming out against the use of lunch boxes if the [NEA] came out for it."



Albert Shanker

Indeed, the AFT likes to needle the NEA on its political and educational views. It published a brochure titled "The AFT vs. the NEA," which recounts, among other things, an NEA official's remarks on theft in the schools. Testifying before a Senate committee, he observed, "Any [economic] system that perpetuates children carrying money, and places those in an awkward position who do not have it to carry, requires a hard, close look."

With its left-of-center political leanings, the NEA has in recent years been the more conspicuous force in national (Democratic) politics. It was largely responsible for the creation of a cabinet-level Department of Education, which candidate Jimmy Carter pledged to establish in return for the NEA's endorsement in 1976. After honoring his vow, Carter got vital support from NEA delegates in his 1980 nomination fight with Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts. (At the Democratic convention, 310 of the 3,331 delegates belonged to the NEA.) The NEA and the AFT have already endorsed Walter Mondale for President in 1984.

Shanker believes that the NEA will soon undergo a philosophical transformation—if only for strategic reasons. The association's opposition to teacher testing, he contends, will win it few political friends during the 1980s. And its leadership is clearly more liberal than its rank-and-file. According to a 1981 NEA poll, 70 percent of public school teachers consider themselves to be either conservative or leaning in that direction. Hence, Shanker believes, the NEA must choose between moderating its stance on educational and political issues or ceding influence to the AFT. He thinks it will choose the former. Speaking of the NEA at the National Press Club last year, he predicted: "Its position will become our position."

cationing and moonlighting is less attractive after a year on the job. True, summers are free; 29 percent of teachers spend the time traveling, 21 percent take outside jobs, and another seven percent work in summer schools. But during the school year, many holidays and some weekends are spent grading papers. The average teacher devotes 46 hours per week to instructional duties. (Nationwide, the average workweek for private, nonagricultural workers is 35 hours.) Further, 59 percent of secondary school teachers surveyed by the NEA in 1981 reported working without compensation on school-related activities for seven or more hours per week. And for many teachers, time in class is *not* spent teaching the subject they concentrated on during college.*

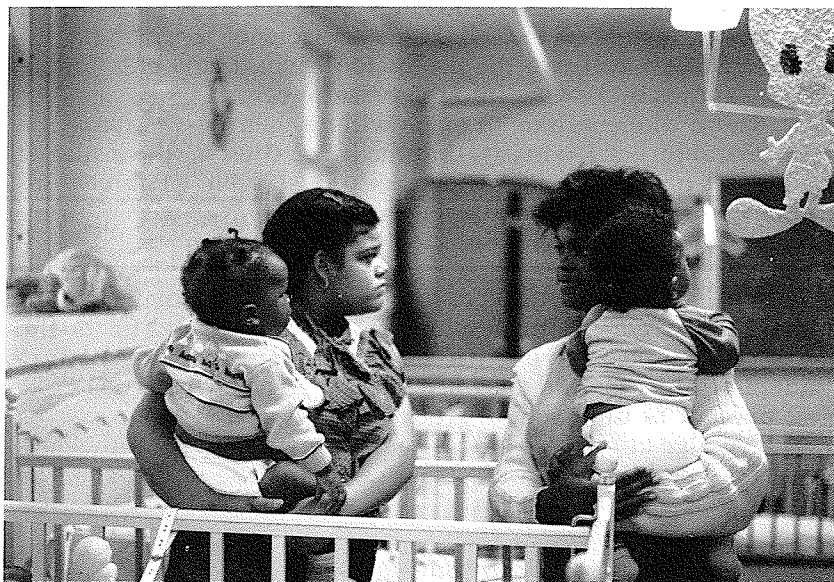
Good-bye to the PTA

But perhaps most demoralizing to teachers is the public's opinion of them. Historically, what esteem has been tendered to teachers in America has been qualified. As Lortie observed, "Teaching . . . is . . . honored and disdained, praised as 'dedicated service,' lampooned as 'easy work' . . . Real regard shown for those who taught has never matched professed regard." Some evidence suggests that "real regard" has fallen even lower in recent years. Seventy-five percent of those citizens surveyed in 1969 said they would "like to have a child of [theirs] take up teaching in the public schools as a career." In 1972, the figure was 67 percent. By 1983, it was down to 43 percent. Parents' day-to-day support for teaching has fallen, too. PTA membership declined from 11 million in 1966 to 5.9 million in 1981 (although part of the drop was due to declining enrollment). Over that same period, the proportion of teachers belonging to a parent-teacher association dropped from 78 percent to 57 percent.

Indeed, although parents were once teachers' reliable allies in a campaign against ignorance and misbehavior, that alliance has suffered from neglect, or worse. Gerald Grant, a professor of education and sociology at Syracuse University, cites in a 1982 study the example of an elementary school teacher who sent a note to parents asking for cooperation in correcting their child's pattern of tardiness. In reply, the father told the teacher to "stop sending these notes that upset my child just because you have a middle-class hangup about time."

The reasons for the precipitous decline of esteem for teach-

*The problem of "misassignment" is less severe now than it was two decades ago. In 1961, 31 percent of public school teachers reported being assigned outside their area of preparation. By 1981, the figure had dropped to 16 percent. Still, in subjects where there is a teacher shortage, such as math and science, the quality of instruction continues to suffer from misassignment.



Students at Cardozo High School in Washington, D.C., tend their babies during lunch period. A day-care center was established at Cardozo in 1981. Pregnant teenagers are now accommodated in many schools.

ers among lay people are many. One is that, in the wake of “women’s liberation,” teaching is now derided by some feminist writers as traditional, hence oppressive, “women’s work.” And unionization may have tarnished the profession’s image. Strikes and bitter salary negotiations, critics of unions say, have undercut the spirit of voluntarism in teaching and have eroded a long-standing source of psychic support for teachers—the sense that their profession is a noble calling, a “secular ministry.”

In some ways, the very *success* of teachers has, over the decades, undermined their social status. As they have educated more youngsters and sent more high school graduates on to higher education, a vast new generation of middle-class Americans with college degrees has formed. Years ago, many parents stood in awe of a teacher’s educational credentials. Few do so now.

It is no surprise, all things considered, that about half of all teachers leave the profession within seven years of their first day in class. The ones who remain will not be the cream of the crop. A study conducted in North Carolina found that, of those white female teachers whose scores on the National Teachers Examination ranked in the top tenth, 37 percent were still teaching

after seven years; of those who had scored in the lowest tenth, 62 percent were still on the job. Math and science teachers are especially likely to leave the profession early: Many can double their salaries by moving into the private sector.

Those who continue to teach will do their best to make the job bearable. For too many, that means settling for the deal. For others, it means specialization. Seeking students genuinely interested in the subject matter, they create courses with alluring names such as "Personal Relations," "Man to Man," and "Troubleshooter." Through such entrepreneurship, they acquire dedicated young followers—just as coteries form around charismatic college professors. Teachers thus end up in the paradoxical position of enticing students *away* from basic academic subjects. And they are succeeding. By the late 1970s, 42 percent of high school students were in the "general" or hodgepodge curricular track—as distinguished from the "academic" and "vocational" tracks. During the late 1960s, the figure was only 12 percent.

From Bad to Worse

This, in a sense, is another deal cut with students, one to which the entire school system is a party. Students who have no interest in high school are given a number of concessions in exchange for their agreement to go through the motions until graduation day. They are allowed to leave school early each afternoon for part-time work, to smoke at lunchtime, to take token courses, to graduate as functional illiterates. In return, the local school system can point to a high student "retention" rate, and thus, to "progress." Few parents or civic leaders complain.

Another strategy by which teachers make their careers tolerable is relocation. Black or white, they tend to transfer from districts that serve poor children to schools serving middle-class children—leaving already turbulent inner-city schools to be staffed by a continual influx of new, inexperienced instructors. This practice is fading as enrollments decline; where demand for teachers slackens, they cannot be so choosy. Yet studies indicate that slum districts and isolated rural schools still have particular difficulty attracting and keeping qualified teachers. Across America, the distribution of talent is as serious a problem as the supply.

For teachers who do not find refuge in offbeat courses or suburban schools, the second decade of teaching can be frustrating. By their late thirties, most have reached the top of the salary scale. Thereafter, they observe college classmates—and former colleagues who bailed out early—continuing to advance

in pay and prestige. The only way to move up is to move out: Become a school administrator, or get out of the business altogether. But how many companies want to hire an untrained 40-year-old? Many teachers, tired of their jobs but unable to find work elsewhere, spend the last two decades of their careers in a state of resignation. The fire is gone.

They are now more likely than ever to succumb to the temptation of the deal. Cumulatively, such compromises further reduce the value of school for the young and, inevitably, undermine public esteem for teaching. This loss of respect spreads from parent to child, eroding authority in the classroom and triggering further losses of prestige for the profession. Thus, low morale among teachers leads to bad teaching, which then leads to lower morale and worse teaching.

Of course, for at least a large minority of teachers, the profession turns out to be, if not all they had hoped for, at least a reasonable facsimile. The most successful teachers have deep reserves of energy, and of patience, and support from higher-ups and community leaders. They derive satisfaction from the knowledge that they make a small contribution—even if it cannot be measured—to the intellectual growth of their students. They endure—indeed, prevail over—the many frustrations engendered by the “system” and by the larger society.

But too many teachers do not. They spend their first day on the job trying to secure order in the classroom so that learning can proceed. But by the end of the week, or the end of the year, or the end of a decade, order has become an end in itself. And learning has fallen by the wayside. The costs to the young and to America are incalculable.

