Introduction:
The Origins of an Idea—A Personal Story

In 1957, the Soviet Union sent the very first space satellite into orbit and my high school opened. We knew our school was different—but we couldn't know that it was one of the first in what would be, historically speaking, yet another new wave of efforts to conduct schooling successfully in nontraditional ways. The school day consisted of four 90-minute periods, with a snack break for everyone after first period. Core subjects met three times a week, electives twice. Classrooms had trapezoidal tables and chairs instead of the conventional desks.

The first 2 years passed quickly. Traditions were established. A student newspaper appeared. Student government was treated with respect, and discipline problems were put into the hands of a student-run Judicial Board. Teacher morale was high; turnover was nonexistent. We all thought it would go on forever—why shouldn't it?

But at the end of the third year, the founding superintendent left for an attractive district in Connecticut, and things began to change. Within 5 years, my high school had a traditional 6-period day, a conventional curriculum, and a token student government. Twelve teachers had left. It was still a pretty good school—but the spark was gone.

In 1967, with two degrees, teaching credentials in social studies and speech/English, and a Fulbright year on my resume, I took my first "real" job—in a brand-new Title III project in Dayton, Ohio. Two years earlier, Congress had passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and Title III was the legislation supporting innovative educational programs. The Dayton project provided a chance for the city's high school students to participate in an after-school fine arts program that included intensive training in art, drama, music, dance, or creative writing. Another new venture, fueled by the optimism of everyone who became involved. Yet after about 3 years, things began to shift away from the innovative and toward the conventional. The Living Arts Center continued, despite various problems, for another 7 years, finally closing in 1977.

By 1973 I was once more involved with an innovative educational program—this time one of the Experimental Schools Programs funded by the Office of Education during the Nixon administration. When I joined the project team in Greer, South Carolina, the project had already been under way for a year. Momentum was good and morale was high.

My job was to be a general facilitator and ombudsman for the teachers at the middle and high schools (my office-mate worked with the six elementary schools) in the project. All eight schools had agreed to implement the Charles F. Kettering/IDEA model of individually guided education (IGE), which included, at the secondary level, the teacher-advisor concept; heterogeneous grouping of the entire student body (no more ninth-grade English, tenth-grade social studies, or physics open only to seniors); a yearly calendar of four 9-week terms; and a catalog of mini-courses half an inch thick for students to choose from. There also were increased parent involvement, with regular parent/student/teacher conferences (the *student* chairing the meeting), and use of the community as a learning resource. A dissemination strategy was part of the plan. It was expected that, as the project schools mastered each component of the changes, their teachers would help the teachers in the other Greenville County schools to function in the new ways.

It was a lot to take on, but the excitement of being one of just a few such experimental sites in the nation generated enough energy to propel everyone through the first few years. And then—of course—things began to change. The student-run parent conferencing model and the use of the community as a learning resource were the first to go. By the middle of year 3, the unique calendar was in jeopardy and project schools were being told that they could no longer expect to have special exemptions but would have to carry on the project within the same limitations shared by all the other (nonproject) schools in the county. Within a few more years, nothing remained of the IGE legacy except the teacher-advisor system, and even that more closely resembled a traditional homeroom period. My position was eliminated at the end of year 4, and I went back to school.

During the course of my doctoral program, I began to see patterns in my experiences with innovative educational programs. As I reflected upon each case and learned about other, similar cases, a very tentative hypothesis took shape—but it stayed in the back of my mind for a while longer. Meanwhile, 10 years after beginning my first job in Dayton, I completed my dissertation and moved to Los Angeles to join John Goodlad's research team and help with the final 3 years of work on the Study of Schooling. This highly detailed study of 38 elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools across the nation was designed to shed light on the internal dynamics of schools and the communities they serve.

When the Study of Schooling ended in 1980, Goodlad asked me to write a book describing the study's findings at the high school level. While struggling to complete the manuscript, I discovered that the findings provided a data-based answer to my emerging hypothesis about innovative programs and why they so seldom stick: The data pointed to a phenomenon that I started to think of as the "deep structure" of schooling (B. B. Tye, 1985). In choosing this term, taken from the work of some contemporary linguists and poets, I wanted to suggest the underlying (and generally unexamined, even unrecognized) but powerful patterns of schooling that are held in place by society's assumptions about what schooling should be. Others have also chosen to apply literary constructs to the description of educational phenomena; see, for example, Tyack and Tobin's 1994 analysis of the "grammar" of schooling.

The deep structure of schooling, I now believe, is composed of the values and assumptions about education that are widely shared throughout our society. Despite our traditions of local control, Americans do not vary greatly in their views of desirable and appropriate educational experiences for children and young people. They have an idea of what a "real" school should look like (Metz, 1989). These values and assumptions are also shaped by conventional wisdom, by tradition, by vested interests—and by a certain amount of institutional inertia. At this point in time, what we Americans expect of our schools includes the physical similarity of classrooms; the overall control orientation of policy, program, and pedagogy; the general similarity of curriculum and of schedules; patterns of resource allocation; faith in test scores as measures of success; and the practices of age-grading and the labeling and sorting of students.

I further suggest that the phenomenon we might think of as the "deep structure" of schooling is undergirded by a number of interconnected phenomena that exert a conservative pull on efforts to change the way things are done in schools. These inhibiting forces are the following:

1. The social context: conventional wisdom, and the role played by the media.

2. The structural characteristics of the institution itself.

3. Fiscal realities, including the strong influence of the knowledge industry.

4. Parent expectations and community assumptions.

5. The demands of teaching and the nature of the teaching profession.

Any one of these inhibiting forces may be strong enough to defeat change. When combined, their effects are so powerful that unless the proposed change is fundamentally compatible with emerging shifts in the deep

structure, institutionalization of the change—*even when adapted to suit local conditions*—may be virtually impossible.

Finally, my hypothesis was complete: Reforms of *any* kind won't "stick" unless they are compatible with the existing deep structure of the society *or with the direction in which the deep structure may be shifting*. If true, this may help to explain much of the failure of both liberal and conservative education reforms in the United States since the end of World War II.

Discovering the Limits of Educational Change

Following the McCarthy years and as the Cold War intensified—and especially after the Soviet Union developed atomic weapons and successfully launched the first space satellite—the U.S. government, responding to energetic public criticism of our schools, abandoned its traditional hands-off policy. With enactment of the National Defense Education Act in 1958, government entered the public education arena in a big way. No fewer than 214 federal programs supporting educational change were funded between 1957 and 1967 (Fallon, 1967; House, 1974; Kirst, 1974). Bailey and Mosher (1968) put it most dramatically: "In the scant period of 13 years (1954–1967) . . . a sea-change has occurred. The Federal government's interest in stimulating change . . . has unquestionably affected the traditional, decentralized autonomies of American education" (p. 2). The years that followed saw increasing federal-level and private foundation support for a wide array of both structural and curricular changes.

In 1960, with the narrow victory of John F. Kennedy, the political scene shifted. Throughout the decade after *Sputnik*, education was on the front burner. The Justice Department took a proactive role in forcing implementation of school desegregation. The U.S. Office of Education and the Office of Economic Opportunity initiated programs such as the Teacher Corps, VISTA, Head Start, and Follow Through. Congress passed—and funded—a massive education reform package, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, in 1965. The National Science Foundation supported ambitious curriculum development projects, some of which, like *Man: A Course of Study* and the "new math," also included expensive inservice training workshop components to prepare teachers to use the new materials effectively.

Beginning in 1961, the Ford Foundation poured millions of dollars into "lighthouse" high schools to demonstrate the value of comprehensive attacks on

> the pedagogical status quo, and in 1968 the Danforth Foundation gave a grant of more than a million dollars to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) for a Model Schools Project designed to create the "schools of tomorrow" . . . The experiment took place under favorable auspices, then, just like the Eight-Year Study. The decade of the 1960s was a time of optimism and urgency when innovation was the watchword. (Tyack & Tobin, 1994, pp. 471–472)

In short, millions of dollars were spent on efforts to improve our system of schooling. Then, as the 1960s ended, some researchers began to take a look at what we had gotten for our money. What they found was both surprising and discouraging.

In 1972 an essay by Charters and Pellegrin, "Barriers to the Innovation Process," appeared in the *Educational Administration Quarterly* and the Ford Foundation released a report, *A Foundation Goes to School*, documenting its less-than-successful experiences with funding school change programs from 1960 to 1970 (Nachtigal, 1972). Two years later, Goodlad and Klein (1974) looked "behind the classroom door" to discover why many of the projects of the 1950s and 1960s had never caught on. The RAND studies of educational change, appearing at the same time, identified a number of factors that made successful implementation difficult (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974). At the same time, however, the RAND authors introduced the helpful notion of *mutual adaptation*—that a new program and its environment interact to produce a local variant which stands a better chance of success than if fidelity to the original vision is insisted upon. Evidently, although many innovative programs had either evolved into different forms or disappeared, educators could still learn a great deal from those experiences.

Over the past quarter-century a massive literature on educational change has accumulated. These works tell story after story of specific projects and programs. Most provide templates for successful *adoption*; some address what is needed for successful *implementation*—actually putting the program in place (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Comparatively few, however, follow the story further. If they did, we would already know much more than we do about the dynamics of the deep structure: those forces that come into play during the third, fourth, fifth, sixth year and beyond, and that alter the innovation so much that in most cases, 10 years after a school (any school you care to name) adopts a change—whether of structure, pedagogy, or curriculum—you can walk into the school and find *not a trace* of that innovation remaining—except in the memories of the old-timers on the faculty.

Knowing What We're up Against

Eight years after the conclusion of the Eight-Year Study, Frederick Redefer (1950)—who had been director of the Progressive Education Association while the study was in progress—pondered the failure of most of the study schools to retain the changes they had made. One conclusion he reached was that insufficient prior attention had been given to the obstacles likely to be encountered:

> Before foundations, committees, or individuals invest sizable sums to improve education, before institutions publicize a new experiment . . . it would be well to investigate what are the factors that must be taken into consideration if the effort is to have a lasting effect. It would be desirable to face the sources of the opposition, to know what are the obstacles and how they might be overcome. (p. 36)

With Redefer's challenge in mind, the remainder of this book is devoted to an analysis of each of the inhibiting forces that hold the deep structure in place. In the final chapter, I offer some thoughts about ways in which school change efforts may be able to "work around the deep structure," by focusing on change at the level I call the *unique personality* of each individual school.

Throughout, in addition to referring to appropriate classic and contemporary works from the literature on educational change, I draw upon data from a study I conducted in the mid-1990s. As a result of doing some reading on more than 30 planned communities built from scratch in the 1960s and early 1970s, it occurred to me that these communities—often designed along the lines of similar "new towns" in Scandinavia—had had a unique opportunity to create new schools unbound by existing traditions and regulations. I also recognized that enough time had passed since those new communities began that it should be possible to explore the ways in which the original visions for those schools had been modified or pulled, by the inhibiting forces mentioned earlier, from the innovative original vision back toward the norm. Information is drawn from archival documents (master plans, planning committee minutes, reports and recommendations by consultants, and correspondence) as well as from interviews with key players in each of three planned communities: Columbia, Maryland; Irvine, California; and Reston, Virginia. I spoke with pioneer board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents. Excerpts from these interviews are included in some of the chapters, as appropriate. In addition, I tracked down and interviewed the pioneer superintendent of my own high school, who went on to serve as superintendent of both the Westport, Connecticut, and the Winnetka, Illinois, school systems; as those

of someone with career-long experience of educational innovation, his views are occasionally included as well.

The Three Communities

In 1963, bulldozers broke ground for what would become the new planned community of Reston, Virginia. Located on 7,000 acres of farmland outside Washington, D.C., purchased in 1961 by Robert E. Simon, Reston would—when complete—consist of five villages and a town center. On October 30 of that same year but 50 miles north in Howard County, Maryland, between Washington and Baltimore, James Rouse publicly announced that he had purchased 14,000 acres of prime farmland and intended to build a new town there. Twice the acreage of Reston, when complete Rouse's Columbia would consist of nine villages and a town center.

On the West Coast, on a quiet ranch south of Los Angeles that had been in the Irvine family since 1870, bulldozers were busy as well. The University of California had persuaded the managers of the Irvine Company to sell part of the ranch for a university campus. President Johnson dedicated the UC-Irvine campus in 1964, and the following year the Irvine Company broke ground for the first of what would become the 10 villages of the new planned community of Irvine, California. By far the largest of the three, Irvine 25 years later would sometimes be compared to Boston in size (though certainly not in ambience).

All three communities included space for business parks in their master plans, hoping eventually to attract major businesses and organizations to situate their corporate offices within their boundaries. Because all three were strategically located in future suburban corridors linked to major metropolitan areas, all ultimately succeeded in doing this.

Although Reston and Columbia each began as the dream of a single person—Robert Simon and James Rouse, respectively—by 1967 all three communities were managed by corporate entities. In varying degrees, homeowners' associations also participated in community decision-making.

Reston celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1990, Columbia's was in 1992, and Irvine's in 1996 (a bit later than the others only because it had not voted for incorporation until several years *after* its pioneer families had settled in).

These three planned communities had much in common, but they had distinct differences too. Though all three new towns attracted primarily well-educated upper-middle-class families, both Reston and Columbia included affordable housing in their master plans. This was done deliberately to ensure some socioeconomic diversity in the pioneer population (both Virginia and Maryland were moving to desegregate their schools

during these years). James Rouse, in particular, hoped that this would assure Columbia of racial and cultural diversity as well. No such philosophy was evident in the original plan for Irvine; in fact, the Irvine Company was fairly explicit about not wanting to get involved in social policy.

Columbia built its town center concurrently with its villages, but Reston didn't get around to building its town center until the late 1980s—almost a quarter-century after the town was founded. Reston retained its rural personality longer than the others, and in fact didn't even install its first traffic light until 1973. Irvine, as mentioned, chose not to have a town center as such but focused instead on creating clearly distinct villages that their residents would identify with first and foremost.

When it came to planning new schools for the anticipated influx of pioneer homebuyers, again the three communities had much in common but there were also some important differences. These are summarized for the reader in the capsule profiles that follow. It is hoped that these profiles will assist the reader in making sense of the additional information on specific topics—often in the form of stories or personal reminiscences—that are brought into later chapters of the book as appropriate.

Community Profiles

Reston, Virginia.

Virginia's public schools are administered by a county system. Automatically, therefore, the new schools of Reston would be part of the Fairfax County Public Schools. The elected board of education and the professional staff of the County Office of Education would determine when, and where, new schools should be built to serve the newly arriving residents. Because Reston was comparatively small and all five villages didn't go up immediately, Reston students attended schools in nearby Herndon. It would be some 12 years before the first new schools actually opened within the Reston town limits.

Fairfax County was proud of its school system—it was not unusual for graduates to be accepted at respected out-of-state universities—and saw no need for the new schools to be much different from the good ones already available. In fact, a strong tradition of evenhandedness dictated that no school receive special treatment unless for an exceptionally sound reason. Some differences in physical plant were tolerated—Terraset Elementary, for example, was an unusual underground building, with an open-space plan and solar heating/cooling system—and some programmatic differences were approved, but, as a rule, policies and resource allocation formulas were applied equally to all schools. Neither Robert Simon nor, after 1967, the Gulf/Reston management team played a significant role in planning for the new schools.

Columbia, Maryland.

Like Reston, Columbia would become part of an existing county district: the Howard County Public School System. Unlike Fairfax County, in 1963 Howard County really *was* a sleepy rural area, with just 9,726 students enrolled in schools that were "accepted as satisfactory by the county population" of farmers and small-town businessmen (Hovet, 1971, p. 35). Those few students who did go on to college tended to choose the local community college or state university.

When James Rouse dropped his bombshell on October 30, 1963, by announcing that he had bought up enough adjacent Howard County farm properties to create a new town, it did not detonate immediately in the Howard County schools office. The explosion came 6 months later, when Rouse presented school officials with an evaluative report by Christopher Jencks, which he had commissioned and which questioned the capacity of the Howard County School System to rise to the challenges presented by the need for new schools in the new town. Though the Jencks recommendations were never formally accepted by the school board, they did serve to goad the staff into a flurry of productive action that led to the reinvigoration of the entire Howard County School System.

Howard County, like Fairfax County, took the position that the new school couldn't have anything that wouldn't also be available to existing schools. Operationally, this took the form of a policy that for each innovative new school built in Columbia, one just like it must be built concurrently in some other part of the county where a new school was needed. As a result, in September of 1968 two model elementary schools opened, and the following year two model middle schools opened in Howard County. As things turned out, when the first high school was built for Columbia (1971), the county did not need a second high school; so an exception was made in that case.

James Rouse took a thoughtful interest in the planning of schools for Columbia, even selling the land for the first elementary school to the Howard County Board of Education for just $1. Although he did not intrude upon the planning process, it seems clear that he had high hopes that the new town and its pathbreaking schools would together form a living laboratory of the best kind of democratic community living.

Irvine, California.

Few children lived on the Irvine Ranch when development began on the first village in 1965. For some years, the existing school districts were able to handle the growing school-age population as pioneer families moved to the new town. Before long, however, it seemed desirable to establish a separate school district to serve Irvine alone; this was done in 1973. Residents elected a school board, the new board hired a superintendent, and the Irvine Unified School District was born. It absorbed

the existing elementary school district, acquiring five established elementary schools and one middle school in the process; it also acquired one existing high school that had been in what was then a neighbor district but on land owned by the Irvine Corporation.

The new superintendent gathered a team together and began holding a series of community meetings in the fall of 1973. Early in 1974 the result, the IUSD Master Plan, was adopted by the school board. It included many innovative features, among them the decentralization of decision-making, including fiscal decisions, to the school sites; interdisciplinary curriculum; high-tech linkages between schools; multi-age grouping; the mainstreaming of students with special needs (*before* the passage by Congress of PL 94-142, the original legislation mandating the mainstreaming of students with disabilities); a strong career education program at the high school level; district-wide open enrollment; and the option of a year-round calendar for those schools that chose it.

The Irvine superintendent went on record as being opposed to the idea of uniformity and encouraged his school sites to be as creative as they could in responding to the needs of their constituencies. In this important respect, then, the Irvine leadership differed sharply from that in Fairfax and Howard counties and, in fact, in most of the more than 30 planned communities that were springing up around the nation in those years (Burby, 1977).

Summary and Conclusion

Though I opened with a story of my personal experiences and how they led me to frame an explanation for the disappearance of new programs and practices, I know that I'm not the first to wonder how it happens; and I won't be the last. The brief overview of key developments in the past half-century or so reveals numerous efforts to understand the dynamics of educational change. It also shows that no matter how often we slide back toward what's familiar, practitioners are ever ready to try again. Habitual optimists, educators always bounce back: There *must* be better ways to do things—there *must* be ways to solve the big and little problems of schools.

Perhaps, though, we could be more selective, choosing projects with a chance of real survival. This is where I believe the *idea* of the deep structure of schooling can be useful. If it helps to explain the past failure of reforms to survive as originally envisioned or even to survive at all, it may also help us to invest our time, energy, and education dollars more successfully in the years ahead. We need more than just a grasp of the idea, however—we need to understand the way the deep structure works. This book is dedicated to that exploration.

In Chapter 1, I define the construct of a "deep structure of schooling" in far more detail than I have been able to do in this introduction. Then, in Chapters 2 through 6, I explore, in some depth, each of the inhibiting forces that hold the deep structure in place. The *conventional wisdom* and the *role of the media* are the focus of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 addresses the *structural characteristics* of the educational system, and Chapter 4 examines some of the *fiscal realities* that inhibit changes in the familiar use of time and space, the grouping of students, and the distribution of resources. *Parent and community expectations* are the theme of Chapter 5. Last but certainly not least, I take a look at aspects of the *work lives of teachers* and the professional norms and behaviors that discourage deep structure change just as effectively as do any of the other inhibiting forces explored in this book.

Finally, I want to assure the reader that there is a light at the end of this analytical tunnel, a silver lining to what looks like a cloud. For although it *is* exceedingly difficult to make permanent changes in things that our society really wants our schools to be and do, there is a place where successful action is possible. Chapter 7 shows that, in addition to the deep structure that permeates the entire society, each individual school has its own unique personality. It is at this level that constructive and lasting reforms can be made, and, I believe, it is at this level that educators and community members can become most effectively and happily involved in the life of their schools.

The book closes with some suggestions for projects at the unique personality level, and I can't resist adding a few speculations as to the possible future of some current educational reforms.

1—
Defining the Deep Structure of Schooling

Every human society has ways of teaching its young those things that it finds important. Most societies—though not all—accomplish this task through the institution of a formalized system of schooling. Children and young people leave home to attend a place called school for part of each week, and their society expects them to master certain knowledge and skills as a result. Beyond this, the institution of education may also fulfill other tasks for the society it serves, such as sorting and channeling young people into predetermined adult roles and preparing them for the world of work. In virtually all cultures, schools are expected to contribute significantly to the acculturation and socialization of the young, reinforcing the norms of their society and teaching them to behave in acceptable ways.

In agrarian or pastoral societies, much education of the young takes place in contexts other than schools. Children learn how to behave and what to do within the family and village or neighborhood setting. Many may never attend a school as such, and for those who do the experience is focused on extra training, over and above what is needed for full functioning in the adult society. This was also the case in the United States prior to the industrial revolution, and, even as recently as 1930, only 50% of the 14- to 17-year-olds in the United States were attending high school. The other half were learning what they needed to learn by participating in their culture—just as were young people in other cultures around the world.

As a larger and larger percentage of its children and young people attend schools, the institution of schooling loses its mystique—and its status—within the society. From something only a select few could do, over time it becomes something everybody does. Inevitably, everybody in the society "knows" what schools are for and how they are supposed to be, because everyone was a student and experienced it firsthand (Labaree, 1999). A conventional wisdom begins to build: Throughout a culture, certain assumptions about schooling are widely shared and taken for granted. In our own culture, these include our taken-for-granted patterns dictating the use of time (the 6-period day and the 9-month school year, for example) and space (the egg-carton schoolhouse, with classrooms of about the same

size regardless of their purpose), age-grading, ability grouping, and the control orientation and custodial function that Americans expect the public schools to fulfill. Local variations and experiments may emerge from time to time, but these do not significantly alter the underlying phenomenon, which is, as a rule, slow to change.

Such assumptions form the deep structure of schooling. It is both a culture-wide *and* a culture-specific phenomenon: All schools in the United States are connected by a deep structure of schooling, and it differs from the deep structure of schooling that connects the schools of Argentina . . . or Korea, Russia, or Zaire. *Every society has its own set of assumptions about what schools are for and how education should properly be conducted—its own "deep structure" of schooling*.

The Evolution of What Americans Take for Granted about their Schools

The deep structure can change, and has done so in our country several times since the colonial era. However, *educators* can't change it. Nor, for that matter, can megabucks, or legislative mandates, or pressure from special-interest groups. The deep structure of schooling, being a sociocultural phenomenon, is bound to the prevailing worldview of that culture at any period, past or present. But if a society is changing in large-scale and significant ways, chances are good that its attitudes toward schooling are shifting, too.

1750–1850: The Academy Replaces the Latin Grammar School

The history of . . . academies in North America demonstrates the interrelationship among politics, the organization of society, and education.
Joel Spring *(1986, p. 22)*

The earliest schools in the American colonies were established to promote basic literacy for the purpose of religious salvation, and the curriculum of these schools consisted of reading, religion, and in some cases the classics—Latin and Greek. At what we think of today as the elementary level, dame schools and town schools were available in many communities; for the sons of the elite, Latin Grammar Schools provided further education. This pattern continued for 150 years, during which time society changed a great deal—but the Latin Grammar Schools changed very little. By the mid-1700s it was painfully clear that the existing schools were unable to provide the practical kind of education increasingly in demand.

Academies, flourishing in England since the late 1600s largely as a social alternative to Anglican dominance of traditional schooling, began to appear in the American colonies in the 1750s. They were not free, publicly supported schools—they charged tuition—but they did offer a new, utilitarian curriculum that included math, sciences, and practical, career-oriented subjects such as surveying, navigation, and agriculture. In short, these academies were just what was needed by a dynamic, rapidly changing society—and they caught on quickly, spreading from the new cities and towns of the East Coast to the western frontier towns. Within just 100 years, there were 6,185 such schools in the young nation (Sizer, 1964).

As the academy movement spread, the Latin Grammar Schools disappeared. As Gerald Gutek (1991) has pointed out, "The academy tended to replace or absorb the Latin Grammar school, because . . . the academy met the educational needs of a civilization that was both frontier and industrial in character" (pp. 99–100). Daniel and Laurel Tanner (1980), calling the Latin Grammar Schools the educational "dinosaurs" of the 18th century, comment that "Institutions must change in order to meet the changing social, political, and economic needs of society or they die. This is as true of the school as of any other institution. The curriculum of the Latin Grammar School was virtually the same at the beginning and the end of the colonial period. Yet a new social and economic structure had developed in the intervening years that required a vastly different education for youth" (p. 225).

American society had undergone a major change, and the deep structure of schooling had changed along with it. By the early 1800s, the American people shared a set of assumptions about what schools are for different from the one that had prevailed 100 years earlier.

1830–1930: Common Schools: From Many, One

Another significant shift in the deep structure of schooling in America was the change from local control to the state-supported common school, and wide acceptance of the need for unity and stability, for assimilation and preparation for democratic citizenship, in a nation of diverse immigrant groups. According to Kaestle (1973), "The central, transforming institutional development in the history of American education was the creation of a common, uniform school system in the 19th century" (p. vii).

The period of nation building that followed the establishment of constitutional democracy was shaped by three complex and interrelated forces: the industrial revolution, immigration and the westward expansion, and the growth of large cities. Into the mix came hopeful would-be citizens from all over Europe and parts of Asia; and Africans, brought by force from their homelands.

Such diversity posed a challenge to the political and educational leaders of the day. By the 1830s, sentiment was coalescing around the notion of schooling as a way to provide all children with a *common* education, one that would provide all with "American" values and acceptable "American" behaviors. The newcomers themselves, whatever their socal class, generally saw this as a legitimate and desirable goal in the "land of opportunity." Ordinary laborers as well as members of the new middle class, understanding that opportunities existed in the new world that had not been open to them in the old, demanded schooling for their children. They saw the abolition of the classes as part of the meaning of democracy, and education as a way for their descendants to rise into positions of power that had previously been unattainable except to the hereditarily wealthy (Cremin, 1951; McLaren, 1998; Spring, 1986).

Thus, for a variety of reasons, by the middle of the 19th century an ethic of inclusion—though it still did not apply to *all* children and young people—had become an integral part of the new nation's assumptions about the purposes of schooling. It was to shape educational policy well into the 20th century.

Common schools, however, were elementary schools. As the United States moved into the 20th century, most teenagers were still going into the work force right after eighth grade. In 1900 only about 10% of the nation's 14- to 17-year-olds were attending high school. A variety of social and economic pressures would soon combine to change that, however.

The new spirit of inclusion articulated by the avid proponents of the common school was extended to the secondary school as the great debate over the proper nature of the high school was finally resolved in favor of the comprehensive plan. A dual system such as existed in Europe, which sent college-bound and workforce-bound students to separate schools, was eventually rejected in favor of one school offering several curricula. The schools of America would—in theory—reflect the democratic ideal: They would bring people together rather than keep them apart. Learning to live and work together cooperatively in school would prepare the young to live and work together harmoniously—despite differing cultural origins, economic status, and career plans. In retrospect, a national policy of this sort seems almost inevitable, given the historically unprecedented circumstances of a new nation being forged out of an assemblage of diverse immigrant groups.

There is another way to look at that development, however. Although it is true that the institution of the comprehensive high school just prior to World War I brought all students together under one roof, the tradeoff—a differentiated curriculum—provided the mechanism whereby the separation of students into different futures could be legitimated (Labaree,

1987). "In the name of egalitarianism," comments Lasch (1978), "they preserved the most insidious form of elitism, which in one guise or another holds the masses incapable of intellectual exertion" (p. 145).

Nevertheless, the move toward universal school attendance continued. By the early 20th century, an increasing proportion of girls were attending high school, and special public schools were being established for children and young people with disabilities (Butts & Cremin, 1953). In the South, the separate schools for black children and youth were maintained at public expense, a logical outgrowth of the charity-schools movement of earlier times. This inclusionary impulse has continued in the second half of the 20th century, making itself felt most clearly through the school desegregation and special education movements.

1930–2000: Schooling as Preparation for the World of Work

The changing nature of the work force played the most important part in the push to keep young people in school, and thus we see again that the needs of the culture determine the nature of the deep structure of schooling. The demographic shift from the farms to the cities changed family life. Adolescents who had helped with farm work could now work in factories, mines, and mills—or they could stay in school and aspire to something more. From a macro social viewpoint, having them stay in school kept them out of the work force and thus made more jobs available to adult workers. This was particularly true during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the proportion of 14- to 17-year-olds attending high school jumped to about 50%. Although compulsory attendance legislation for elementary school was in place in most states by 1918, similar legislation requiring school attendance to age 16 was enacted in the 1930s in many states.

It was during this period of time, too, that American society began to acknowledge what it had been moving toward since the early days of the academy movement, namely, widespread agreement that the purpose of formal schooling is to get a good job. Years of schooling were henceforth seen as a financial investment and a guarantee of upward mobility (Benham, 1979b). Students today can be heard to mutter, when bored with a class, "*Why do we have to study this? I don't need to know this to be a—*." It hardly matters what career is mentioned.

From the 1830s, then, to the 1930s, as a diverse society struggled to weld itself into a unified whole, new educational policies extended schooling horizontally, to children and young people of all backgrounds. It sought to establish itself as an economic system in a time of change from farming and cottage industry to industrialization and the factory system; and other educational policies extended schooling vertically, to increasingly older groups of students.

1880–1950: The Structures of Schooling Become Fixed

Historians differ on exactly when American society—and the deep structure of schooling—settled into its present form, but most agree that the formative era was over by the early 20th century. Michael Katz (1975) places the date even earlier:

> The basic structure of American education had been fixed by about 1880 and it has not altered fundamentally since that time. . . . It is, and was, universal, tax-supported, free, compulsory, bureaucratic, racist, and class-biased. . . . It is as if the characteristics noted above form the walls of a box within which other sorts of change have taken place. The box is filled with objects that can be moved around and rearranged, but the walls themselves remain solid. (p. xix)

Whatever the date one argues for, it is generally agreed that by the early 20th century, the basic structure of the U.S. public school system was in place: mandatory elementary, junior high, and high school; the school district system; state boards of education; and state certification of teachers. In all but the smallest schools, students were grouped by age and, in the larger schools, they were often grouped by ability as well. The school year and the school day were fixed. School buildings grew in size—especially following the period of consolidation in the mid-20th century—but within those large buildings, individual classrooms remained about the same as they had been in the days of the one-room schoolhouse. Even after World War II, when movable furniture replaced desks that were bolted to the floor, most desks still faced forward, in rows. All of these familiar characteristics are a product and a reflection of the deep structure of schooling in America for most of the 20th century—of the assumptions we have learned to take for granted: the "walls of the box."

Despite this, one might reasonably argue that there have been three shifts in the deep structure of schooling *since* midcentury: consolidation, desegregation, and special education.

The 1950s: Consolidation.

Although city schools had been large for some time, in 1930 there were still 130,000 one-room schoolhouses in the rest of the country. By 1980, there were fewer than 1,000. The number of school districts in the nation dropped from 127,531 in 1932 to 16,960 in 1973 (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Midwesterners of my own generation can still remember local battles to prevent their small-town schools from being closed and their children sent to the larger school in a nearby community. This shift was enhanced by the postwar appearance of a new demographic phenomenon: the suburb. Suburbs, in turn, had been made possible first by the spread of automobiles and then by the related development of the modern highway system. School buses in growing numbers appeared on the roads. Riding

the bus became an unquestioned part of a student's experience of schooling, and transportation was added to the budget of most school districts.

The maxim that "bigger is better" quickly became part of the conventional wisdom, especially at the secondary level where it was now seen as important to provide a wide range of courses, each with its own appropriate materials and equipment. This differentiation was accepted as a functional necessity for the complex postwar society. In the name of choice, students were separated into groups and given schooling experiences that would define their futures. The high school grew as large as many a factory and, as in a factory, a sense of community was diminished. That the efficiencies possible in a large high school would be a Faustian bargain did not begin to occur to people until several generations had attended consolidated school systems.

The 1960s and 1970s: Desegregation and Special Education.

The two significant changes since the 1960s were the desegregation and special education movements. I would, perhaps, reserve judgment on whether these actually represented shifts in the deep structure of schooling. Although it is undeniable that society has been profoundly changed by both, on reflection it seems that *schools*, at their deepest operational level, function much the same as ever, regardless of what kinds of students are in attendance.

Events and Ideas that Shaped the Deep Structure of the Late 20th Century

The events and ideas of 17th- and 18th-century Europe—the notion of fundamental human equality, the overthrow of monarchies, the rise of a vigorous middle class, and the opening up of a new land, in which anyone might make of himself what he could—combined to undermine the old order of western civilization. People abandoned a world that had always been stable and where life had been predictable, in favor of the chance to make a better life. This idea would have been unthinkable to the common people just a few generations earlier. It seems that the "great ideas" that shape the worldview and assumptions of a society at any given point in time are often heretical when first proposed but follow a predictable path to public acceptance. Thus, the ideas of liberty and equality, radical in the 1600s, were enshrined in the founding documents of the United States 100 years later. The ideas of Darwin, Marx, and Freud, heresies of the 19th century, have shaped the 20th, and so forth (Schumacher, 1973).

That individuals could improve themselves, and that society as a whole, composed of enough individuals intent on self-improvement,

would also—inevitably—improve was one of the beliefs of many who supported the common school movement in the mid-1800s and was also a cornerstone of the Progressive movement of the early 1900s. Inextricably entwined among the other inducements that the new nation offered its newcomers were the ideas of upward social mobility and of progress.

As the United States entered the 20th century, there was much that needed improving, and the progressive spirit pervaded many social institutions, including education. Obviously, most people agreed, schooling was a key to improvement, both of individuals and of society. *How* schools were to accomplish this was not, however, a matter of universal agreement. Some progressive thinkers, impressed by the efficiency of factories and swept up by the promise of science to yield answers to the most basic human problems, advocated efficiency measures and standardized techniques. "Both the work-place and the schools, as well as other nineteenth-century institutions," notes Kaestle (1983), "were partaking of the same ethos of efficiency, manipulation, and mastery" (p. 69). Other educators, equally committed to progress, focused on the nature and the needs of children as individual learners.

These two very different orientations led to quite different assumptions about what schools were for and how schooling should be conducted. The "two camps" of the Progressive Education movement were grounded in the larger progressive impulses of the entire society during the period from about 1880 to 1930. Close study of American education in the years since then reveals what appears to be a pendulum-swing from one to the other, with the dominance of either approach partly dependent on the state of the economy and of national security at any given point in time. But one could argue that the child-centered, or "soft progressive," views were the views of educators and others involved with schooling and were not necessarily shared by the population at large. Paul Mort (1957) astutely observed over 40 years ago that educators are sometimes guilty of seeing things normatively—as they wish they were—rather than descriptively—as they actually are:

> Much of the shouting against "progressive education" which is not now, nor ever was, present in public schools to any great degree, is an example of the results that may come of the imprudence of administrators talking about what they'd like as if it were what they have. (p. 185)

That is why periods of child-centered education have never really altered the underlying social/economic/political system of the nation, which has remained reliably skewed in favor of those in power (Martin, 1991) and those who favor efficiency and standardization (Eisner, 1994; Levin, 1991;

Theobald & Mills, 1995). The image of the pendulum-swing must, therefore, be understood as a metaphor that does not truly enlighten. The image proposed by Katz (1975), of moving the furniture around inside a box (which doesn't itself change), may be closer to the uncomfortable truth. As David Purpel (1989) has noted:

> [It is] important to note the persistence and continuity in the stucture and content of American public education. Contrary to some folklore, for example, the 1960s were not a time of widespread radical changes in public education . . . the changes adopted were well within existing frameworks of traditional goals and objectives of the in-place system. (p. 14)

What, then, *has* been the worldview of the American people in the 20th century? I believe it to be predominantly behavioristic and mechanistic. The growth of technology and the accompanying faith in science to improve the quality of life has had a powerful impact on our outlook, perhaps without our even being fully aware of it. Certainly it has shaped the deep structure of schooling within which most of us have lived and worked.

The "cult of efficiency" and the image of school-as-factory have fitted quite nicely into this behavioristic and mechanistic worldview, particularly since the end of the consolidation movement left the nation with such large schools (Callahan, 1962). Americans generally have stood by and nodded with approval as children were sorted into categories and grouped first by age and then by ability (as determined by tests that were seen as scientific and, therefore, as reliable and valid). Policies formulated in the spirit of efficiency were implemented relatively quickly. It's not so far off base to note that children and young people have been viewed (usually from outside the educational system but sometimes even from within it) as "raw material," and that teachers have been regarded—and treated—as "interchangeable parts." Occasionally one even finds assembly-line metaphors applied to the teaching-learning process (though usually *not* by people involved with the day-to-day challenges of teaching).

The curriculum also has been structured on a behavioral model: Specify "outcomes" first, then build the content in small chunks, assuming that a study of the parts will lead to an understanding of the whole. Assume further that all meaningful learning can be seen as measurable behavior and, therefore, can be tested using norm-referenced instruments; and that because those instruments have been developed scientifically, that somehow makes it okay for a certain proportion of the students to fail.

The issue of student failure points to two other elements of the 20th-century worldview that we must consider: the deeply engrained as-

sumptions of social Darwinism and of radical individualism. Coexisting with a belief in the possibility of upward mobility through hard work has been the judgment that those who do *not* manage to better themselves are *less worthy as people*:

> The competitive ethic preached by the social Darwinists was not, of course, new to Americans, for it resembled the old Protestant ethic implanted in the American soil by the Calvinist Puritans. Instead of justifying hard work, discipline and thrift on theological grounds, the social Darwinist did so on the basis of the "latest scientific theory." The Puritan, the capitalist, and the social Darwinist could thus all subscribe to an ethical code that . . . saw poverty as a deserved punishment for the shiftless, inefficient, and wasteful. (Gutek, 1972, p. 265)

Such views continue to shape the deep structure of schooling in America, for if it were otherwise, how can we explain the appalling condition of impoverished inner-city and rural schools, or the vast discrepancies in resources available to school districts even within just a few miles of each other? As a society, we evidently now take it for granted that some children don't deserve our help; we can do that without batting an eye, because the social Darwinist assumption and the mythology of America as the "land of opportunity" tells us that each child can make it, if he or she will only work hard and play by the rules. A clear-eyed, unflinching look at the real world, however, reveals that the playing field is far from level and that children do not have an equal chance now . . . if, indeed, they ever did (Kozol, 1991). Furthermore, if we are being honest, we also must admit that the educational system itself has contributed to the maintenance of this harsh reality. For example, one school restructuring project failed to get off the ground because the teachers "continued to believe that the problems lay with the students, and not with the school, and that the challenge was thus to fix the students" (Raywid, 1994, p. 30).

I have taken considerable time to look at the deep structure sociologically and historically, because it is a construct that is inseparable from context, from the gestalt of any era. Indeed, it is itself a part of the context of our lives; that is its very nature.

Recognizing the Deep Structure—Variations on a Theme

As I've said before, what I'm suggesting isn't exactly new. Others have written about this idea, albeit using different language and a wide array of images. What they all have in common, however, is that they address

the phenomenon of an underlying set of beliefs and practices that hold familiar and taken-for-granted aspects of schooling in place. Seymour Sarason (1982) taught us to think of the "regularities" of schooling: those structures, behaviors, and habits that are so deeply rooted that we don't even recognize them as problematic. To help us "see" these patterns, Sarason asked us to look with alien eyes: as if we were visitors from outer space. Maxine Greene (1973) posed much the same challenge: to "make the familiar strange," and so to become aware of the boxes in which we as a people have confined ourselves. "One reason the individual can rarely think clearly about the renewal of society or of an institution to which he belongs is that it never occurs to him that he may be part of the problem . . . part of what needs renewing," observed John Gardner in 1963 (p. 160).

Over 20 years ago, John Goodlad (1975) aptly described the process by which regularities become taken for granted:

> When certain expectations for schools become pervasive in the surrounding community and society, schools begin to take on what appear to be relevant tasks, not as goals but as activities and conditions. These, in time, become regularities or givens in the operation of schools and are recognized as such by successive generations. Certain regularities in home and community life tend to grow up around school customs, such as the times for beginning and ending the school day. Innovations in these customs, especially those already regulating home patterns to some degree, are suspect or even taboo. It may be easier . . . for example, to instill a new science program for the upper elementary years than to send children home an hour early on Thursday afternoons so as to provide time for teachers to plan together. (p. 10)

With some caveats, Larry Cuban (1984) has employed the metaphor of a hurricane to convey a mental picture of educational change and the deep structure of schooling: "Images of storm-tossed waves on the ocean surface, turbulent waters a fathom down, and calm on the ocean floor lent themselves well to agitated squabbles over curriculum theories, textbooks, and classroom instruction" (p. 10). Although an impression of change may be created by public excitement about an identified problem and its proposed solution, in fact deep beneath the surface things go on pretty much as they always have.

David Tyack and William Tobin (1994) explore the "grammar" of schooling, and Mary Haywood Metz (1989) speaks of a persistent "common script," noting that it serves symbolic as well as functional purposes (p. 81). Bruce Joyce (1982) wrote about *homeostatic forces*, which pull innovations back to the prevailing norm. Purpel and Shapiro (1995) analyzed public discourse about education and discovered a level of consensus that they found remarkable, given the size and diversity of the nation. Elliot

Eisner (1994) agrees that American schools are driven by "fairly uniform expectations for a shared way of life that is both long-standing and widespread" (p. 53). MIT management guru Peter Senge (1990) uses the term "established mental models," noting that they are powerful and deeply entrenched because they are "largely tacit" (pp. 11–12). These tacit expectations or "mental models" are, in effect, the conventional wisdom aspect of the deep structure, which we examine in more depth in Chapter 2.

Peter Airasian (1988) notes that an innovation will achieve social acceptance if it is compatible with the social values of the day. Sarason (1983) makes the same point, even more vividly: "We got to the moon when we did because that abstraction we call 'society' had come to see such a feat as congruent with its interests. . . . Ideas, for good or bad, have transformed the world but only after they have gained a currency that makes them seem consonant with the self-interests of that world" (p. 183). It's ironic that a reform has a good chance of success if it is in tune with the prevailing cultural values—what, then, makes it a "reform"? Nevertheless, this is an important point about the deep structure: It accommodates changes that are compatible and defeats changes that are not. It's wise, therefore, to recognize this before tackling something that is *too* unconventional.

Conclusion

At this point, we have established a context for our exploration by reviewing some pertinent historical background and by defining the construct "deep structure." In a nutshell, the deep structure is a composite of widely held beliefs about what schools are for and how they should function, coupled with a number of inhibiting forces that actively seek to prevent change in how schools are put together and work. That changes *do* happen and sometimes even become permanent can be attributed to shifts in what society demands from its schools. It is possible to see that this has happened a number of times in the history of American public schooling, and we can assume that it will happen again—although it's not so easy to recognize a deep-structure shift when it is actually taking place and one is living through it. Supporters of the academy movement in the late 1700s, the common schools movement in the mid-1800s, or the consolidation of small schools and districts into larger units in the mid-1900s, were sure only that they had a better idea. It is unlikely that they were consciously aware of the ways in which those reforms were actually supported and made feasible by other changes that were happening in society at the time.

The phenomenon now commonly known as the "conventional wisdom" is an inextricable part of these other changes, and in every era the

conventional wisdom is conveyed within a society both by word-of-mouth and by the media. Broadsheets, newspapers, and the Chatauqua circuit in earlier times; radio, TV, and the internet today—the media of the age spread news and at the same time they promote certain values and create certain images and assumptions in the populace. In the next chapter, we take a closer look at the conventional wisdom, how it works and how it can inhibit some kinds of educational change.

2—
The Social Context:
Conventional Wisdom about Schooling

What Americans assume to be true about their public schools may or may not *be* true, but we believe it anyway, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. In 1958, economist John Kenneth Galbraith gave this social-psychological phenomenon a name: He dubbed it the *conventional wisdom*. More recent writers are using the term *popular ideology*, which refers to much the same phenomenon but with the added dimension of belief or value systems. Embedded in both constructs is the notion of *common sense*, which is an integral component of popular ideology. Common sense is a concept that has always been dear to the hearts of the American people. Indeed, as Stuart Hall (1986) has pointed out, the assumption that we can rely on our common sense to see us through most problems is a cherished part of our conventional wisdom: "Common sense is itself a structure of popular ideology . . . reflecting the traces of previous systems of thought that have sedimented into everyday reasoning" (p. 55).

The conventional wisdom is part and parcel of what we absorb in the process of becoming socialized within a particular culture, and it settles into the taken for granted and usually unexamined aggregation of beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions that form our worldview. In Sarason's (1983) words,

> It is a characteristic of widely held but unarticulated assumptions that they serve the purpose of defining and bulwarking individual and societal perceptions of what is right, natural, and proper. . . . So, for example, up until relatively recently (by the clock of history) males and females did not have to think about what a woman was, what roles she should play, and where she would play them. These were not issues to be examined, not because people were told not to examine them but because the socialization process put them beyond the realm of questioning. (pp. 25–26)

This is not to suggest that the conventional wisdom is permanent. As we shall see, it does change with the march of events.

What We Take for Granted about Schools

At the close of the 20th century and the threshold of the 21st, what is the conventional wisdom about public schools in the United States? The following may sound familiar:

> Schools are chaotic, dangerous places.
> Teaching is an easy job, with lots of time off.
> Too much money is spent on schools.
> Schools today are not doing a good job of teaching the basics.
> A quiet classroom is one where learning is taking place.
> The most effective teaching is traditional, frontal, and teacher-directed.
> Children should be grouped by age and ability.
> Parents should participate in running the schools.

On a more positive note, we also believe that *any child can succeed if he or she works hard enough* and (against all the evidence) it is part of the conventional wisdom that *we have equal educational opportunity in this country*.

It's also the conventional wisdom that *there is no national consensus about what schools are for*, but is this true? Doesn't the existence of a "deep structure" actually constitute a consensus of sorts? In fact, general agreement about the purposes of schooling in the United States is long-standing. During the period from the end of the Revolutionary War to the beginning of the Civil War:

> People in different classes, with different political perspectives or different educational philosophies, could agree on a list of purposes for common schooling: moral education to produce obedient children, reduce crime, and discourage vice; citizenship training to protect republican government; literacy for effective economic and political participation; and cultural education for assimilation and unity. (Kaestle, 1983, p. 101)

Every September the Gallup Poll provides the nation with a summary of what Americans believe about and want from their schools. Of course, it reveals a range of opinion and some regional differences; but what sticks in most people's minds are those points on which large percentages of citizens agree. This fundamental agreement (despite outlying alternative viewpoints) is part of the deep structure of schooling. In this particular case, it seems that the conventional wisdom maintains a belief that simply doesn't hold up under scrutiny. We all assume that Americans don't agree about schools, when in fact they do. Why, if the conventional wisdom is an integral part of the deep structure, would this seeming discrepancy exist?

The answer may be that the assumption that Americans don't agree on what schools should be or do has some operational advantages, even if it isn't really true; this is probably why we cling to it. Its face validity (and thus its secure niche in our popular ideology) derives from the wide variety of regional or local differences that can be found in individual schools and school districts. If Americans accept the myth that agreement among diverse constituencies is impossible, the illusion of local control is maintained and the inexorable drift toward increased centralization at the state and national levels is masked. Thus, the myth of unresolvable disagreement serves the purposes of those who support the development of a national system as against authentic forms of local control.

Because the conventional wisdom is itself one of the components of the deep structure of schooling—one of the inhibiting forces that pull educational innovations back toward traditional practice—we need to take a closer look at some of its most powerful assumptions, and then we need to think about how these are created and take root in the popular consciousness.

The Appropriate Purposes of Schooling

Both historical and contemporary documents reveal that four basic goals for our schools have emerged over the past 300 years. Furthermore, these appear to be remarkably stable (Goodlad, 1984; Johnson, J., and Immerwahr, J., 1994; Rose & Rapp, 1997). Americans expect their schools to attend to the academic, vocational, civic, and personal development of children and young people. They would be unhappy if schools were to abandon any of these goals.

The Academic Goal of Schooling.

This is generally taken to mean mastery of the traditional "basics" (composition and literature, mathematics, natural sciences, history, civics, and—maybe—geography). Physical education, music, and art—and, in the more affluent schools, computer literacy—are also considered important. Beyond this, definitions of what is "basic" tend to diverge according to *which students one is talking about*. The comprehensive high school, with its array of electives, has traditionally taken care of these differences. (I return to this shortly, in a discussion of the conventional wisdom concerning curriculum and instruction.)

The Vocational Goal of American Schooling.

To most Americans, this means appropriate preparation for work or for college. Whereas school subjects such as office practices and shop courses come easily to mind, less obvious school expectations such as learning to be on time, tidy, and cooperative are also considered important "vocational" goals.

We often hear, now, that business and industry want our high schools to turn out graduates who have mastered the basics but have not been trained for any specific occupation. "Give us broadly educated, trainable, adaptable young workers," we hear. Some political economists and people whose business it is to study the nature and needs of the work force seem to agree, pointing out that children in school today will fill jobs that don't even exist yet, and so obviously they cannot be trained in specific skills. The rhetoric of "learning how to learn" is heard far and wide.

Taking the broadest possible view, one must admit that in any society at any time one of the purposes of educating the young is to prepare them for their roles as productive adults—whatever that may mean in any particular culture. So our schools can hardly behave as if the vocational goal isn't important. The open questions have to do with whether individuals have some choices and some control over their lives as both learners and workers or whether the marketplace, in the final analysis, determines everything.

The Civic and Personal Goals of Schooling.

These are not as easy to pin down. There seems to be general agreement that "citizenship" must be taught in schools, and that it is appropriate for children and young people to develop self-confidence, self-discipline, friendly relationships, and good habits of hygiene as outcomes of their schooling; but within these generalities there is a lot of room for disagreement as to specifics. When it is suggested that schools might abandon these goals, however, there is general protest. In fact, in recent years many *additions* to the required curriculum fall into these goal areas—drug and alcohol abuse units, anti-gang programs, suicide prevention, AIDS and STDs awareness, self-esteem enhancement, community service, and programs for at-risk youth, for example.

Disagreement about specifics, then, is one thing; making any major changes in the widely accepted and deeply rooted goal areas themselves is quite another. They are firmly entrenched in our conventional wisdom about the purposes of schools. Any innovative programs that would change these would face an uphill adoption battle or, if implemented, would be difficult to institutionalize.

The Custodial Function of the American School

One function of the schools that has been important to society for quite a long time but that is seldom publicly acknowledged or discussed (and never included in formal goal statements) is their role as caretakers of children

and young people during the workday. In the early 1800s, "Parents who sent very young children to school seem to have done so through a desire to have them out from underfoot as much as from eagerness to get them started on the three R's early" (Kaestle, 1983, p. 15).

This expectation of child custody has effectively prevented any serious rethinking of the traditional 9-month school year in most parts of the country. Where an alternative calendar has been adopted, the change has seldom been accomplished without considerable local argument. This is an example of how one small part of the deep structure—societal assumptions about the proper use of time in schools—can thwart innovation.

The situation can get even more dramatic when changes in the school *week* or *day* are proposed. Numerous districts have faced stiff community or parental resistance, or both, to regularly scheduled shortened-day or student-free-day arrangements that allow teachers to have some planning and decision-making time together. It's odd that in most businesses it is assumed that staff meetings will take place on company time, during the workday; but this opportunity is not extended to K-12 educators at their workplaces. But it isn't odd at all when one bears in mind the strength of the custodial function of schooling in the minds of the American people.

Curriculum and Instruction

The persistence of the subject-centered curriculum is, in itself, evidence of the strength of the deep structure of schooling. In the 20th century it has been most striking that time and again efforts to make the curriculum more interdisciplinary and integrated have held for awhile, then yielded to pressures that reinstitute the old familiar pattern. One can visit schools from coast to coast and border to border and one will find the same subjects being taught, often in the same way and even from the same textbooks. This is our national curriculum, whether we admit it or not; and as a society we will not tolerate much change in it. At this level, elementary students have no curricular choices at all, and secondary students have choice only between available electives.

Local variations in curriculum serve to mask these commonalities and contribute to the myth of local control mentioned earlier, but in reality it hardly matters that high school students in the midwest can take agriculture courses while students in coastal communities may have the option of taking oceanography. These remain peripheral to the common curriculum—English, history and civics, math, life and physical science, and physical education—which all must take before choosing electives.

If the common curriculum is one side of the coin, similarity of instructional method is the other. In neither case does society tolerate much innovation, although individual schools may get excited, for a time, about efforts to "reform" in these areas. On the whole, such reforms rarely last beyond the first 3 to 5 years before starting to slide back to the old familiar patterns.

In the case of instructional method, those old familiar patterns include a preponderance of teacher talk/students listen and a hefty dose of worksheets, questions-at-the-end-of-the-chapter, and paper-and-pencil tests. That this is what teachers *do* is discussed more fully in Chapter 6. That this is what parents—and society in general—*want* or, indeed, *insist upon* is of concern as we ponder the role of the conventional wisdom in shaping the deep structure of schooling.

Team teaching is one of those instructional methodologies that has come around a number of times in the past and will, no doubt, be rediscovered again and again. An interesting case study by Gold and Miles (1981) tells the story of the first few years of an innovative elementary school in which team teaching and individualized instruction were among the changes being attempted. The pressure of parent and community expectations, based on conventional wisdom about appropriate teaching methods, was one of several deep-structure forces that combined to defeat these particular changes.

From the RAND change studies we know that planned innovations rarely survive in their original, "pure" form as envisioned by the designers; instead, they normally undergo some kind of "mutual adaptation" that permits them to survive in modified form (McLaughlin, 1978a). In the Gold and Miles (1981) study of Lincoln Acres School, we learn that such adaptation began as soon as *week 3 of the first year*. Single teachers in self-contained classrooms began to replace teacher teams before the end of the first semester. Teams were gone entirely by the end of the first year, and individualization of instruction had been only partly achieved. Gold and Miles point out that "the adjustments made to 'solve' the problems substantially altered the original vision . . ." and, later, that "after a struggle, the school now fit the parents' image of education, not the educators' . . ." (pp. 281, 300, 340).

It seems to me that "adaptations" of an innovation being implemented are always made in the direction of the traditional and familiar, and virtually *never* in the direction of the new and experimental. They are negotiated agreements to modify the original vison in the direction of the tried-and-true, or to abandon the vision altogether and "go back" to business as usual. This may be particularly true in the case of instructional methods, because in this area our collective sense of what is both appropriate and possible (the conventional wisdom) has been shaped by our own experiences as students.

The Myth of Equal Educational Opportunity

The myth that there is truly a level playing field in America when it comes to chances for a good formal education has deep roots in our history. There was the frontier—open for anyone to settle (one had only to sidestep the inconvenient fact that one had to displace the people who already lived on it). There were homestead laws, making it possible for any poor immigrant with a bit of initiative to own land. Completion of the transcontinental railway system hastened the process. In the growing cities and towns, there were niches just ready to be filled by the enterprising. Newcomers flooded the new world, convinced that here, even the most lowly European peasant could become wealthy and powerful. And in fact there *were* chances for upward mobility—up to a point. (No one cared to look carefully at the dark side: the abysmal working conditions that made the boom years of the industrial revolution possible, for example.)

The story we tell ourselves—and others—extended to our system of public schooling. From the Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647 to the common schools movement of the mid-1800s to the establishment of the Office of Equal Educational Opportunity in the 1960s, it has been a cherished part of our national self-image to believe that everyone has an equal chance at the gold ring. We've also liked to think that our system is a meritocracy—ever since Thomas Jefferson proposed his *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*, Americans have held fast to the idea that the system allows the best and brightest to rise to the top (and that they can rise from any social class). Herbert Spenser's formulation of "social Darwinism" was just a new way of saying what Americans had believed for quite a long time: that the "fittest" will do well and that, conversely, if one doesn't do well, it must be that one is *less fit*—and less worthy. It's a circular line of reasoning that neatly justified the emerging status quo as the frontier closed and American society settled into the patterns we know today.

Today, there is little room for debate when it comes to equality of educational opportunity. Jonathan Kozol's 1991 book *Savage Inequalities* became an instant classic in large measure because Americans recognized its central truth: that the playing field is far from level, and that complex social forces conspire to prevent meaningful equalization. As others have said, "Should the accident of geography determine the quality of science instruction a child receives, whether he has an opportunity to learn to play the violin, whether her first-grade class will have twenty students or thirty-five?" (Wise & Gendler, 1995, p. 499). And although the answer (provided by state and federal court rulings in school finance cases) has often been *No, it shouldn't*, in fact it *does*—and has done for many, many years. Of course, it isn't geography alone but a complex web of related factors that

in effect make the term *geography* a code word for *poverty* and *substandard housing* and *no afforable health care* and *stressed families*—and all the other forces that, combined, prevent equal educational opportunity. As Robert Bullough (1988) has observed, "The race for knowledge and position is far from fair even at the starting line; most of those who get ahead even within a public school setting begin with tremendous advantages" (p. 14).

The American tendency to "blame the victim" instead of recognizing the *systemic* causes of inequity is vividly illustrated by Mary Anne Raywid (1994) in describing a $40-million project designed to "enhance the life chances" of at-risk youth. Changes in both school structure and instruction were agreed upon by all those involved, but 3 years and many dollars later, nothing much had changed, because the staff of the school "continued to believe that the problems lay with the students, and not with the school, and that the challenge was thus to *fix the students* [italics added]" (p. 30).

We also need to acknowledge the role played by racism as an element within the conventional wisdom. At this point in our nation's history, when most white middle- and upper-class Americans think of "poverty," they automatically think in terms of the nonwhite population. We are invariably surprised to learn that higher numbers of whites than nonwhites receive welfare support, for example; or that more teenage mothers are white than otherwise. We exclaim, momentarily, and then settle back comfortably into our comfy old armchairs and assumptions.

The mythology of equal educational opportunity and the realities that it masks seem particularly short-sighted in view of demographic changes presently under way in the United States. With a growing percentage of citizens over 65, a correspondingly smaller proportion are available to do the nation's work, pay taxes, and generally keep the wheels turning. We'll need every one of our young people to take his or her place *in the work force*—not on the streets, and not in prison. Assuming that poor rural or inner-city children are incapable of high educational achievement (and therefore shouldn't have schools as good as those we provide for affluent suburban youngsters) is diametrically opposite to our own best long-term interests. And yet, strangely enough, just this assumption is firmly embedded in our conventional wisdom at this point in time.

Standardized Testing

The 20th-century worldview in the United States has been—as I argued in Chapter 1—predominantly mechanistic and behaviorist. Enamored of the *idea* of efficiency, we applauded the time-and-motion studies and task analyses of the early 1900s. From there it was a small step to mass testing and to

the development of behavior modification techniques. Treating human beings like so much raw material in need of processing, and then post-testing to measure the quality of the "product," came to seem normal and natural in a world increasingly dependent on machines of all kinds (Gould, 1981).

A great deal has been written about the factory model and its applications to American schooling; I don't need to review it here. Pertinent to this discussion of the conventional wisdom about schooling as the 21st century dawns, however, is the *intensification* of a shared belief in the power of standardized tests. It seems that, rather than running its course and giving way to a new paradigm, the mechanistic worldview is alive and well and shows little sign of abating any time soon.

Indeed, it has become even more entrenched in the years since 1978, when state-mandated, high-stakes testing appeared and was quickly accepted by the public despite the absence of clear empirical evidence that such tests actually do what their proponents claim they can do: to raise both standards and student achievement. According to Peter Airasian (1988), "the testing programs are powerful symbolically; they strike a responsive chord in the public at large and this response helps explain the widespread and speedy adoption of an innovation that had virtually no track record in American education before about 1979" (p. 311).

In effect, Airasian is saying that the deep structure of the present time supports standardized testing. David Purpel (1989), in discussing the same phenomenon, notes that "The code word for this renewed energy for using the school to sort and weed is 'excellence,' and the basic technique for implementing the policy is testing. . . . 'Excellence' has through a relentless process of reification and reductionism come to mean high scores on normative standardized tests" (pp. 18–19). Here, the conventional wisdom takes on an aura almost of magic or superstition—as if attaching a compelling name (in this case, "excellence") will make something true. And, as with some magic, we believe it despite all evidence to the contrary. Why? Perhaps because, as Purpel implies, the schools are actually doing *precisely* what our society as a whole really wants them to do: acculturate, socialize, sort, and indoctrinate—and, in the process, protect hierarchy and privilege. Standardized testing serves this purpose well.

Kahne (1994) identifies the way standardized tests ensure the success of some students at the expense of others: "Uniform and comparative measures of success can transform efforts to equalize opportunity and achievement into zero-sum arrangements. This occurs when a student's grade in a class or score on a standardized test reflects his or her achievement relative to others. As a consequence, the success of some students comes to depend on the failure of others" (p. 239). Anyone who has ever graded "on a curve" will recognize that no matter how well the entire class

does—even if *everyone* did extremely well—there still will be failures: Arraying students around a group average guarantees it.

The Role of the Media in Shaping the Conventional Wisdom

Although print media have played a part in both educating the citizenry and in shaping public opinion since colonial times, the 20th century has seen quantum leaps in this area, as electronic media—radio, cinema and ultimately television—entered our lives (and, some say, took over). Social critics such as Vance Packard (1981), Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore (1967), Neil Postman (1985), and others showed us how our values, opinions, and behavior are determined by marketing strategies and by the ways in which national and world events are covered in the print and electronic media. John Goodlad, in 1984 but without irony, asked, "Has television become the common school? If so, what is left for the public school?" (p. 42). As the 20th century ends, educators still have not come to grips with these uncomfortable questions (Maeroff, 1998), and now they are exacerbated by the rapid spread of computer technology as well.

Where Americans Get Their Information

A national research study conducted by Goodlad and his colleagues in the late 1970s included questions about where parents and community members got their information about the schools in their community. "Radio or television" and "the grapevine" were the two most common responses: These adults seemed quite willing to accept as credible what they were told by others, whether on TV or over the back fence (B. B. Tye, 1985). In such a society, we collectively grant our media moguls tremendous power over our minds. Some may argue that the conventional wisdom always has been shaped by those who control and limit the dissemination of ideas, that contemporary media power is just a matter of degree, and that in fact the World Wide Web and the internet are going to take us all in just the *opposite* direction: wide-open access to information. Maybe so. But whatever happens, there will never be a time in which societies are not held together by some common assumptions—whether, as we have seen, they are true or not.

The Attraction of Bad News

A number of respected educators have tried, in recent years, to correct some of the many misconceptions that were being perpetuated in the media and

taken for granted by many—perhaps most—Americans. For example, Gerald Bracey's annual *Phi Delta Kappan* articles through the 1990s clearly document the misuse and misinterpretation of data by the media in its coverage of schooling in America. But was he able to find a forum for his position in the popular press? Far from it. Reading Bracey, one might conclude that something about the way in which Americans have been socialized in the second half of the 20th century makes us willing to trust negative news about schools that is *false* and to distrust positive coverage that is *true*. "Why do some 'facts' slip so easily into the popular culture while others that contradict them are rejected outright?" Bracey (1994) wondered (p. 82). Two years later, Bracey (1996) pondered the selectivity of calls for "balance" in reporting the news about schools, noting that coverage of good news often includes rebuttal by dissenters, whereas coverage of bad news is usually left to stand alone.

David Berliner also spoke out to counter the incessant barrage of misinformation and negatives, first in a 1993 article that was turned down by the *Atlantic Monthly* and other mainstream publications, and ultimately published in an education journal (Berliner, 1993). Then, in 1995 he and Bruce Biddle co-authored a book on media misrepresentation of the schools, *The Manufactured Crisis*, which was not aggressively marketed to the general public. For many who were interested, the only way to get a copy was to special-order it.

In June of 1994, Larry Cuban of Stanford University showed how business interests made use of negative media about the schools *when it served their purpose* in drawing attention to the need for a "better educated" work force to improve the national economy. But when the economy did, in fact, improve, the same business leaders never gave any credit to the school reforms that had been put in place in response to their earlier demands. The same point was made in a *Newsweek* column in March of 1998 (Elliott, 1998), but in general this is not a view that gets much media coverage.

Speaking of self-serving attacks on the nation's schools, James P. Comer (1980) some years ago pointed out that school problems "are 'good news' to some, like those politicians, reporters, scholars who advance their own interests and careers on the backs of school problems and people. In too many instances, the more complicated the problem the more simplistic the explanation given and solution proposed" (p. 15).

Social critics such as John Gardner (1963), founder of the citizens' group Common Cause, locate the power of the conventional wisdom in the nature of *vested interests* within the society. Following Gardner's line of reasoning, it is to *somebody's advantage* that schools should be the scapegoat for so many social problems. Daniel Tanner (1998) reminds us that the education establishment itself must share some of the blame for plac-

ing bad news in the public eye. When flawed research produces evidence of serious problems in the system, the media are all too ready to trumpet the findings as "news." He uses a 1993 study of adult illiteracy to make his point, showing how despite the study's weaknesses in definition, sampling, and item validity, the popular press seized upon the report with glee.

I mention Tanner's analysis because it serves no useful purpose for us to assume that all the negativity is caused by "others," and because it is a good illustration of Gardner's point about vested interests. Readers will readily recognize that many other people, groups, organizations, and institutions in our society contributed to the negative attitudes about public education popular at the end of the 20th century.

The image of public schools as dangerous places that one finds depicted in recent feature movies and in television programming is rarely what one would encounter on a visit to most schools, though a series of real-life schoolyard shootings by armed children and young people in the late 1990s added to that impression. The image of pervasive chaos and danger does reflect what many Americans have come to believe, and it contributes to the perpetuation of these beliefs, however warped, and to the consequent difficulty faced by educators when they attempt to correct such misconceptions. "Most reporters realize that public opinion often seems to have a life of its own . . . . Conventional wisdom quite frequently rules, in spite of evidence to the contrary" (Watson, 1998, p. 734).

The power of the conventional wisdom to shape popular opinions and attitudes is seen most clearly in the discrepancy between what people say about schools in general and what they say about the schools that their own children attend. Year after year, the Gallup Poll on education shows that parents in a controlled national sample give their children's schools a grade of average *or above*. They should know, after all. But this is never "news." The power of one vivid negative story to overshadow the thousand daily accomplishments of students and teachers is, literally, awesome.

Some educators, taking a longer sociohistorical view, trace the current antipathy toward public schooling to the willingness of educators, in the years since the end of World War II, to take on greater responsibilities. It is ironic, and considerably depressing, to understand that to some extent school people have themselves contributed to the problem of negative conventional wisdom by raising society's expectations of what the schools would be able to accomplish. On the other hand, what has changed in the past will change again. Cremin (1961) brings us full circle, noting that "The conventional wisdom accommodates itself not to the world that it is meant to interpret, but to the audience's view of that world. And since audiences tend to prefer the comfortable and the familiar, while the world moves on, the conventional wisdom is ever in danger of obsolescence" (pp. 350–351).

Ultimately, even the media cannot resist the pull of a changing world, whatever the vested interests that tug against that pull.

Periods of Transition in the Conventional Wisdom

I proposed in Chapter 1 that the deep structure of schooling changes only when the nation comes to want something different from its schools. Now it needs to be said, in addition, that such shifts are invariably accompanied by changes in the conventional wisdom. The power of the conventional wisdom (or popular ideology) holds institutions in place. Once in a great while, it helps to overturn or alter them; then it coalesces and solidifies around the new beliefs and practices, legitimizing them as it once did earlier formations.

So integral to the deep structure is the conventional wisdom that, in fact, I find it virtually impossible to envision one without the other. But are they then, perhaps, merely the same phenomenon called by two different names? No: The *deep structure* is the complex of accepted educational policies and practices existing at any given historical moment in a culture; the *conventional wisdom* is part of a sort of ideological glue that holds those policies and practices in place. The popular ideology must change before the deep structure of schooling will change—it cannot be the other way around, because the deep structure of schooling is, by its very nature, reactive. It sits ponderously in place, like a very old bear, until prodded or jostled into shifting to a different position. Even a very old bear can move, though; and the conventional wisdom can shift, pulling the deep structure along with it.

Is the bear on the move again? Are we now, at the end of the 20th century, in a period of significant social transition? Michael Apple (1993), among many others, suggests that the nation lost its moorings in the 1960s and 1970s, and has not yet formed a new anchoring self-image. Sarason (1983) implies that the incessant barrage of negative criticism of the schools may indeed be an indicator of profound social change-**in**-progress: "Precisely because society expects so much and so many different results from schooling, criticism of schools tends to be sustained and varied. Ordinarily the criticism is muted and unorganized, but *when there are sea-swell changes in the society, criticisms become stronger and more focused* [italics added]" (p. 36).

Robert Bullough (1988) has suggested that Americans may have simply given up on the idea that almost everyone is capable of understanding public issues and making informed decisions. Public education is still supported, but primarily because it is a ritual we are accustomed to, and because it keeps young people off the streets. "Education," he concludes,

"is not the primary aim of schooling. Rather, it is the socialization and control of other peoples' children. For our own children we parents want something better and many of us would gladly abandon the public school to achieve it if necessary" (p. 16). This provocative statement assumes even greater significance in light of recent turn-of-century reforms such as charter schools and various attempts to privatize the institution of public education.

There have been many other indicators that suggest that profound changes are under way in the United States. It is tempting to conclude that western society in general is, indeed, in a period of transition. And yet . . . we are all so culture-bound that we might mistake transitory ripples for sea-change.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the conventional wisdom undergirds the deep structure of schooling by providing the "taken-for-granted" ideas that are used to justify the way things are done. Such ideas include the following: that Americans cannot agree on the purposes of schools (even though we really do); that schools should play a custodial as well as an educative role; that there is certain appropriate subject matter that should be taught; that teaching methods shouldn't deviate far from the banking model (deposit information into their heads); that all children have an equal chance to achieve success in school; and that standardized testing yields educational excellence.

Some of these are openly acknowledged and vigorously defended, whereas others can almost be viewed as *subconscious* assumptions shared among the population as a whole. Whatever the degree of public recognition, however, as aspects of the current conventional wisdom, they are part of the deep structure: Their very existence goes far to inhibit changes that might be attempted in these areas of educational endeavor. As I have tried to show, they shape every aspect of the schooling enterprise; and they themselves are shaped by the workings of the print and electronic media of our time.

Strange but true: The messages we receive from the media are more powerful than what we know from personal experience. As I noted earlier, national polls repeatedly show that parents of school-age children are reasonably pleased with their own child's school but are at the same time convinced that American schools in general are going to hell in a handbasket. One would think that a generally satisfied parent might be just a little bit skeptical of so much negative media coverage, and willing to say: That's not

my experience. That they are neither may, sadly, suggest one of the real failures of our system of public schooling: promoting the rhetoric of democracy while at the same time discouraging generations of Americans from raising their voices in constructive critique of the status quo. All that is left to us is the mindless mouthing of the conventional wisdom, articulated for us by others.