Educational Change Over Time?
The Sustainability and Nonsustainability of Three Decades of Secondary School Change and Continuity

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Purpose: This article presents the conceptual framework, methodological design, and key research findings from a Spencer Foundation-funded project of long-term educational change over time.

Research Design: Based on more than 200 interviews, supplementary observations, and extensive archival data, it examines perceptions and experiences of educational change in eight high schools in the United States and Canada among teachers and administrators who worked in the schools in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Findings: The article indicates that most mainstream educational change theory and practice in the field of educational administration neglects the political, historical, and longitudinal aspects of change to their detriment. Educational change, it finds, is shaped by the convergence of large-scale economic and demographic shifts that produce five change forces (waves of reform, changing student demographics, teacher generations, leadership succession, and school interrelations) that have defined three distinct periods of educational change during the past 30 years.

Conclusions: These forces and their convergence have ultimately reaffirmed the traditional identities and practices of conventional high schools and pulled innovative ones back toward the traditional norm in an age of standardization (though to a lesser extent where the schools are professional learning communities or have an activist orientation). Conclusions are drawn in the form of a strategic theory of sustainable change.

Keywords: educational change; secondary education; sustainability; standards-based reform

This article and the four following it present the methodology, findings, theoretical insights, and strategic implications gained from 5 years of data collection and analysis on the subject of long-term Change Over Time?

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programs in eight U.S. and Canadian secondary schools, through the experience of teachers and administrators who worked in them in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

In a world and a field of educational administration where almost all educational change efforts and explanations are based on snapshot views of change that do not exceed a span of more than 4 or 5 years, these articles and the projects from which they derive examine change (and its absence) in the long run. The articles identify five major internal and external change forces that are responsible for major shifts of direction in the life of a school and those who work within it. They show how across all schools, these forces converge at particular historical moments to define a distinct periodization of educational change that amounts to considerably more than recurring cycles, waves, or swings of the pendulum. This periodization has its origins outside schools in major economic and demographic upswings and downswings. The project and articles show how these change forces and this periodization impact on conventional and innovative schools, respectively. In doing so, they clarify the nature of and raise questions about the sustainability of educational change efforts over time, throughout the educational environment, as changes in any one school affect others around it. Last, grasping the longitudinal nature of interrelated and cumulative change forces on the educators who undergo them casts fresh light on the prospects for and sustainability of contemporary movements in standards-based reform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For more than three decades, in the field of educational administration there has been intensifying interest in the problem of educational change (Fullan, 1982; Sarason, 1972), in why teachers resist it (Datnow, 2000; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Hubberman, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989) and in why it is difficult to “diffuse” innovations (Havelock & Havelock, 1973) and generalize or “scale up” reforms (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Elmore, 1995; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2004) beyond pilot projects or from one school or district to others. Educators appear to know how to create islands of change but not how to construct archipelagoes or build entire continents of them (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996). Because of their size, bureaucratic complexity, subject traditions and identifications, and closeness to university selection, high schools have proved especially impervious to change and to adapting to the changing learning needs of their increasingly diverse student body (Goodson, 1983; Grant, 1988; Hargreaves, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Siskin, 1994).
Some high schools do manage to change fundamentally in ways that benefit all their students (Louis & Miles, 1990), but these change initiatives rarely last or spread. Indeed, although many innovations can be implemented successfully with effective leadership, sufficient investment, and strong internal and external support (Gross, Giaquinta, & Bernstein, 1971), very few innovations reach the institutionalization stage when they become a routine and effortless part of most teachers’ practice (Anderson & Stiegelbauer, 1994; Fullan, 1991).

Wave after wave of change initiatives promise to conquer the intractability of educational change (Sarason, 1990). The most recent of these include forcefully executed, closely aligned, and intensively applied large-scale reform efforts at the district (Elmore & Burney, 1997) or national level—as in 15 years of U.K. National Educational Reform (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998), Secondary School Reform mandates in Ontario, Canada (Gidney, 1999), and the Comprehensive School Reform movements (Datnow et al., 2002) and No Child Left Behind legislation in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). However, after registering initial gains in test scores, even these tightly coordinated efforts seem to produce results that plateau after 2 years and that have a much stronger impact on elementary school students than on those in high schools (Fullan, 2003; Stein et al., 2004). Producing deep improvement that lasts and spreads remains an elusive goal of most educational change efforts (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998).

Ultimately, the sustainability of educational change (whether what matters, spreads, and lasts) can only be addressed by examining change experiences in a range of settings from the longitudinal perspective of change over time. Yet most investigations of educational change are based on (often overly optimistic) snapshots of the early implementation of particular change efforts (e.g., Lieberman, 1995; Wasley, 1994) that do not monitor the extent of their long-term persistence. These have spawned popularly adopted and seemingly universal principles, lessons, or rules of change that show little sensitivity to time or context beyond the snapshot studies. These rules or lessons include the claims that practice changes before beliefs (Huberman & Miles, 1984), that it is better to think big but start small (Fullan, 1997), that evolutionary planning works better than linear planning (Louis & Miles, 1990), and that the most effective change strategies are top-down and bottom-up (Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994) and combine both pressure and support (Fullan, 1993).

Because of the funding and policy logic of research projects, contemporaneous longitudinal studies of educational change usually have a ceiling of 5 years and most typically focus on the impact of particular initiatives with a limited shelf life (e.g., Smylie et al., 2003). Evaluations of change persisting
longer than this usually concentrate on particular networks such as the League of Professional Schools (Allen & Glickman, 1998), the Coalition of Essential Schools (Muncey & McQuillan, 1996), or the National Writing Project (Lieberman & Wood, 2002), which sit outside the mainstream.

Existing historical studies of school change provide some insights into its sustainability and nonsustainability. These point to broad patterns of organizational persistence and development in the long-term history of change (Cuban, 1984), the fate of particular reform movements and policies (Tyack & Tobin, 1994), and to reform in particular areas like curriculum (Goodson, 1983). Reform effects figure less strongly in historical studies of single schools and their experiences of change (e.g., Goodson & Anstead, 1998; Grant, 1988; Labaree, 1988), where factors such as leadership succession, shifts in district focus, and the maturing lives and careers of teaching staff seem to lead to an attrition of innovative energy over time (e.g., Fink, 2000; Gold, 1999; Smith, Dwyer, Prunty, & Kleine, 1987; Smith, Prunty, Dwyer, & Kleine, 1988; Smith, Prunty, Kleine, & Dwyer, 1986). Life cycle research on the effects of age and career stage on teachers’ (Huberman, 1993; Sikes, Measor, & Woods, 1985) and principals’ (C. Day & Bakioğlu, 1996) orientations to change shows how educators’ responses to change as they age vary according to their prior experiences of change in earlier career. But the interrelated and cumulative effects of age and career stage factors in the change process have not yet been examined in terms of their impact on individual schools or larger systems.

Almost alone, Brouillette’s (1996) doctoral study of the geology of school reform in a small school district shows how school change processes are embedded in an interrelated set of longer term change forces that extend beyond the district, and even the educational system itself, to wider change movements in society as a whole. Nespor (1997) has undertaken a similar analysis during a shorter time period of how networks of influence involving urban development patterns, the changing economy, school district politics, race relations, superintendent succession, business pressures, and reform movements affect change initiatives and processes in one elementary school in the context of its district. In general, with just a few exceptions (e.g., Oakes, Quartz, & Lipton, 2000), change theories neglect these larger political and social forces that give change its historical meaning and significance; or they appeal to generalized theories of paradox (Deal & Peterson, 1995) or complexity (Fullan, 1993; Hoban, 2002), where there is no place for power or the past.

Most change theory and practice in educational administration has only a forward arrow. In rational terms, this omission is remarkable, for what else is change about if it is not about time, about the movement from one state to
another (Goodson, in press)? Perhaps the reasons for this neglect are ideological and political rather than rational and implementation focused. As McCulloch (1997) argued, many politically driven reform efforts and the change theories on which they draw either ignore the past or stigmatize it as something to be left behind, or swept aside—as in assertions that the 1970s was an age of “uninformed professionalism” in education (Fullan, 2003). The past is treated as a problem to justify political mandates to direct the future. As one reform-driven Ontario education minister in the early 1990s famously said in remarks that were captured on video, “You can’t change if you are improving” (Hargreaves, 2003; Lafleur, 2001). Sarason’s (1990) long-standing observation that most explanations of educational change avoid thoughtful engagement with a historical and political perspective still applies.

The Change Over Time? project set out to investigate the sustainability of educational change by looking retrospectively at how educational change forces have exerted their effects across eight secondary schools during three decades in two countries. In this sense, and in comparison to the existing literature, the project has analyzed change longitudinally and retrospectively, through the eyes of teachers and administrators, over a good deal longer period than the 5 years that contemporaneous studies normally allow. It has focused not only on exceptionally innovative schools whose experiences do not transfer easily to the mainstream, or on the impact of particular change efforts or reform movements in isolation from the other changes that schools experience, but also on how a diverse range of schools have generated and responded to multiple change efforts and forces—ones that are internal to the school as well as ones that are externally imposed—during a long period of time.

A key question was provoked by Tyack and Tobin’s (1994) ground-breaking history of the “grammar of schooling.” In their analysis of the impact of five different reform movements from the early 20th century, they argued that the ones that reinforced an existing, taken-for-granted “grammar” of subjects, classes, lessons, age-grades, and testing that had defined public education from the late 19th century were the most likely to be adopted and become institutionalized. By contrast, innovative reforms that were interdisciplinary, open-plan, or mixed up the age categories challenged the grammar and enjoyed only localized or temporary success. By examining change forces that included but also extended beyond reform movements, and by deliberately searching for different patterns of innovation, the Change Over Time? project sought to deepen and develop Tyack and Tobin’s thesis. In doing so, the project has not treated the educational system as one governed only by its own logic. It has sought to tell a story of action within a theory of context
Involving significant and sometimes epochal changes in the wider social, economic, and political landscape that have affected schools as institutions and the lives and missions of those working within them. As an Irish saying proclaims, “You have to listen to the river if you want to catch a trout.”

DESIGN AND METHOD

The retrospective and contemporaneous study of Change Over Time? called for an intensive qualitative investigation of a range of secondary schools, using archival and observational data, but concentrating especially on the oral testimonies of teachers and administrators who had worked in these schools for some or all of this 30-year period.

Site Selection

A purposive sample (Merriam, 1997) was employed to identify eight (originally seven) secondary schools serving differing communities and having varying structures and cultures. The schools were located in two countries (within Ontario, Canada, and in New York state in the United States) to compare and contrast patterns of educational change across national settings and to reduce the risk of attributing all change events to one country’s own reform agendas.

Three schools were concentrated in one “rustbelt” city of the northern United States. They comprised a magnet school established to counteract White and bright flight to the suburban perimeter (Barrett); an urban school with an increasingly unionized staff, which catered to students not attracted to the magnet (Sheldon); and a small, alternative high school that was established in the aftermath of race riots in the 1960s and that challenged the traditional grammar of schooling and even the idea of “school” as a walled institution as it struggled to maintain its mission and existence through activist engagement with its community in the face of successive reform movements (Durant). The other five schools were located in southern Ontario, Canada. They comprised an academic collegiate in a leafy suburb facing modest changes in its student population (Talisman Park); a high school with a stable staff that once served a small, all-White rural community but now catered to a student body of increased ethnocultural diversity in the context of rapid urbanization (Stewart Heights); a secondary school that was once one of the
most innovative in Canada but now largely indistinguishable from those around it (Lord Byron); a secondary school recently established on the lines of a learning organization and supported by advanced technological capability (Blue Mountain); and a predominantly working-class school with an almost century-old tradition of technical, commercial, and artistic education (Eastside). Four of the schools appeared to conform to the traditional grammar of schooling described by Tyack and Tobin (1994), whereas the remaining four seemed, to greater or lesser degrees, to have tried to challenge that grammar in different ways by developing more innovative identities.

In summary, the sample comprised magnet, urban, suburban, innovative, alternative, academic, and vocational institutions. Where possible, the schools were also selected because team members had prior research relationships with them that would deepen the basis for trust with and understanding of participants in the research sites. These prior connections also made available existing supplementary databases on which the research team could draw to strengthen the overall analysis. More extended descriptions of each case are provided in the articles that follow. Table 1 summarizes their chief characteristics.

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Interview Sample

The core database of the study was teacher interviews. The interviews were embedded within a wider ethnographic investigation and understanding of each school (Agar, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Woods, 1986). The interview data were collected from three cohorts of teachers who had worked in the schools in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. There was some deliberate overlap of membership across the cohorts to establish historical continuity and depth in the sample. A subset was included of teachers whose experiences in their respective schools stretched back to the 1980s or 1970s. To avoid bias by administrative nomination, participants were initially selected from staff lists for 1974, 1986, and 1998 at regular statistical intervals. The selections were then reviewed and adjusted to ensure representation of enough teachers (up to 25%) who had worked in their respective schools across two or more cohort periods; and to ensure a balanced composition of different subject departments (high and low status, large and small, with more than one teacher drawn from each of the larger departments). Teachers at different career points; teachers of different gender, race, and ethnicity; and a mixture of teachers in regular classroom roles and leadership positions were also included in the sample.

Cohorts 1 (1974) and 2 (1986) comprised 12 teachers each per school, whereas Cohort 3 was a slightly larger group of 14. This formed an important baseline against which to compare the contemporaneous effects of reform and other changes in at least two separate occasions during the data collection period. Principals and at least one assistant principal were also interviewed for Cohorts 2 and 3. Some teachers were deliberately selected because they had taught in their school for many years across multiple cohorts. Approximately half the teachers interviewed in each case (except the most recently established one) spanned two and sometimes all three cohorts in their school.

In some cases, the nature of the schools or the research team's prior research relationships with them necessitated some modifications in design. In the innovative school established in 1994, only the most recent cohort was interviewed; fewer interviews were conducted in the urban alternative school because of its small size; and the vocational school drew more extensively on an existing historical database that was supplemented with a smaller number of contemporaneous interviews. Interviews with 186 teachers were conducted in total, supplemented by more than 50 repeat interviews or questionnaires with Cohort 3 teachers and interviews with administrators for Cohorts 2 and 3 (see Table 2).

All interviews were conducted with participants’ informed consent. They were semistructured around a deliberately limited number of eight questions...
with subsidiary probes to allow for maximum rapport and for authentic and emergent rather than research-driven establishment of meaning, interest, and priority in response. Interviews took between 1 and 2 hours in most cases. They focused on teachers’ motivations toward and patterns of entry into teaching; their working relations with colleagues; their perspectives on and espoused practices concerning teaching, learning, and the nature of their students; teachers’ careers and career stages; teachers’ understanding of and metaphors for the culture of their schools; teachers’ past and present experiences of externally imposed and internally initiated change; and the connection between teachers’ experiences of work and change to their lives outside school. Life history interviews with principals and other administrators in Cohorts 2 and 3 were conducted on similar lines.

The semistructured nature of the interviews called for extensive training and feedback among the research team to learn how to manage and become comfortable with its relatively open-ended design. Interviews were conducted face to face except when Cohort 1 members were geographically inaccessible. Telephone and e-mail interviews were substituted in these cases. Some repeat interviews of Cohort 3 were also carried out in this manner when reform impacts and teachers’ work-to-rule action because of union reaction to standardized reform in Ontario created difficulties in scheduling face-to-face interview time.

Interview data were methodologically triangulated with school observations and documentary evidence (Denzin, 1970). Archival data provided an important complement and sometimes a counterbalance to teachers’ interview recollections. Such documentary data comprised minutes of meetings,
staff lists, mission statements, school aims and objectives, evaluation reports, curriculum outlines, course catalogues, school yearbooks, newsletters, newspaper articles, proposals for reform and change, and departmental memos. Schools varied in the quality of their available archival data. Some schools discarded their records, forgot where they were stored, or had them stock-piled in filing cabinets of former principals, whom we accessed as we could. In general, schools with a more self-conscious sense of academic pride, or ones like Durant, Eastside, and Lord Bryon, which felt they were establishing and having to defend a distinctive and sometimes deviating mission, were the most likely to compile and keep the detailed records. More unremarkable schools like Sheldon or Stewart Heights did not.

As part of its triangulating strategy, the research team also collected observational data in the course of visiting schools for individual interviews or to collect archival sources. Observations took place in whole school and departmental staff meetings, course planning sessions, parents’ evenings and visits, parent council meetings, implementation team meetings, and professional development sessions. Other observations and discussions of a more informal nature took place in locations such as staff lounges, departmental rooms, or cafeterias.

To provide a clearer sense of context, data were also collected at the district level. These were typically arranged more systematically than documents in individual schools. The U.S. district site possessed detailed demographic data on the ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic status makeup of the student body on an annual basis. Such data were also available for the city as a whole. Because Canadian districts do not yet collect information of this sort, census data were used as a substitute. Other relevant district data included documents on educational reform and other changes that impacted the project schools, the minutes of board meetings, school evaluations, long-range plans, administrative reports to the board, presentations by public delegations, lists of promotions and transfers, budget information, enrollment reports, and correspondence with the Ministry or State Department of Education. All district policies and procedures were typically catalogued, dated, and tracked.

University and school district ethical protocols were respected throughout the project. The individual, district, and schools are fully anonymized in the study. As is often the case, adhering to ethical protocols sometimes caused frustrating delays. Confidentiality procedures at the board/district level because of retirement agreements with teachers’ unions, for example, meant that permission of former teachers of the schools being studied had to be secured through the board/district before they could be approached directly by the research team.
As in physical science, the very phenomena being studied typically impact on the means of investigating them (Hargreaves, 1986). Accelerated attrition rates in the teaching force because of demographic turnover, reform impacts, and early retirement packages necessitated identifying replacements for some of the original interview sample in Cohort 3, although this also provided access to studying a new, incoming generation of teachers. In Ontario, reform measures that halved teachers’ time out of the classroom, reduced the number of department heads, imposed a heavy burden of curriculum implementation, and led to work-to-rule union actions made it extremely difficult to schedule the planned repeat interviews. As an alternative, a number of interviews were therefore substituted with paper or e-mail open-ended questionnaires, an opportunity that was then also made available to the U.S. sites for reasons of consistency.

Data analysis was extensive and collaborative. After intensive team deliberation, it was decided that first-order analysis would take the form of substantial school case studies of more than 100 pages each, organized according to a set of thematic lenses derived from the proposal, developed through teamwork, and decided by the team (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In other words, the unit of analysis was the school case rather than, say, types of teachers across all cases. The initial themes were teachers’ life and work; the external context, including policy and demographics; school culture; school structure; school identity; and leadership and mentorship. Case drafts were circulated to all other team members for feedback as critical friends. The principal investigators oversaw the process and provided detailed feedback along with other team members. Using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), each case and its author raised emergent issues that were then tested and investigated in the other cases. Through this process of analytic induction (Lofland, 1995) and after many individual case redrafts, the initially selected themes were recrystallized into nine, then five major change forces that were perceived as significantly affecting a shift in the course and character of all schools. These five change forces were waves of policy reform, changes in leadership and leadership succession, changing teacher demographics and their impact on teachers’ generational missions, shifting student and community demographics, and changing patterns of relations among schools. The five forces emerged as those that most significantly affected the structures, cultures, and identities of the schools over time. Three of these change forces are analyzed in detail in the ensuing articles in this issue: teacher generations and nostalgia (Goodson, Moore, & Hargreaves), leadership succession (Fink & Brayman), and interschool relations (Baker & Foote).
Each case writer also looked for significant changes of direction in their schools and dated and labeled these as the markers of defined periods in their schools’ organizational history. The resulting, highly detailed case reports provided the project database for all subsequent cross-case analysis. Grids were then created for each school, interlocking the five change forces with the chronological periods and their effects on structure, culture, and identity within each period. This process led, with uncanny clarity, to the detection of a distinctive threefold periodization for all schools, in two countries, in terms of the causes, nature, and consequences of educational change (Goodson, in press). In combination with literature searches, this analytical process also helped create the basis of a theory of sustainability of educational change (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004, in press).

Throughout the analysis, stringent efforts were made to capitalize on investigators’ deep personal knowledge of their own cases while guarding against overattachment to them. Each school, therefore, had a second team member assigned to it, to develop knowledge of it, albeit in a lesser capacity. When undertaking cross-case analysis of the five change forces, a baseline principle of searching for disconfirming data was established in which all analyses had to include and account for at least three divergent school cases in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is why all the ensuing articles in this issue revolve around three cases. From the outset, therefore, all team members undertook responsibility for developing cross-case insights and ideas as well as reports on their own particular school cases as a way of ensuring that team members did not project their own ideological or generational preoccupations on to their chosen schools (Hargreaves & Moore, 2004). The cross-case analyses draw freely and fully on the individual school case reports but do not cite them directly.

In the remainder of this opening article, the overall findings of the Change Over Time? project are presented in terms of the five major change forces that individually, and together, led to substantial changes of direction within secondary schools; the effects of these change forces on the structures, cultures, and identities of the project schools; and the convergence of the forces at particular points in time in ways that defined distinct historical periods across all eight schools in both countries. Evidence for most of the findings summarized here can be found in the ensuing articles on teacher generations (Goodson, Moore, & Hargreaves, 2006 [this issue]), leadership succession (Fink & Brayman, 2006 [this issue]), interschool relations (Baker & Foote, 2006 [this issue]), and the capacity of different forms of innovative school structures and cultures to resist evolutionary tendencies toward the attrition of change (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006 [this issue]). In this article, issues not discussed in the companion articles, such as the impact of student
demographics or waves of reform, will be exemplified through data drawn from the case of Stewart Heights—one of the least discussed in the other articles.

THE FIVE CHANGE FORCES

Waves of Reform

The Change Over Time? project confirms the historical research of Tyack and Tobin (1994), which indicates that schools are subject to influence by repeated waves of reform that define historical periods or directions that the schools, depending on their identity, either embrace or resist. These waves challenge, then in turn revert to traditional grammars of schooling defined in terms of conventional academic subjects, schedules, tracking, and assessments. Teachers accept or resist particular reforms according to the correspondence or not of the reforms with their generational missions, their academic subject orientations and commitments, and their school’s identity. Thus, social-justice-oriented reforms that challenged the traditional grammar of schooling and increased teachers’ curriculum autonomy were more likely to be embraced by teachers during the time they started building their careers in the 1970s by teachers working in and drawn to the four schools with explicitly innovative identities and (especially with later instances of innovative reform in the early 1990s) by teachers outside the mainstream, high-status areas of curriculum in guidance, special education, and minority subjects.

Reforms that reinforced the traditional grammar of schooling and exercised more constraints on teacher autonomy were more typically embraced by teachers who, in generational terms, began their careers later than the mid-to late 1970s; by teachers in Barrett Magnet who felt that they were already meeting required standards; by teachers in the traditional, academic environment of Talisman Park who welcomed the academic emphasis of subject-based reforms; and by teachers in mainstream, high-status subjects, especially science and mathematics, whose subject-based commitments, identities, and careers aligned with the substance of the reforms.

The response of Stewart Heights to a reform known as The Transition Years in the early 1990s provides a clear example. Introduced by the first-ever socialist government in Ontario history, The Transition Years sought to restructure grades 7, 8, and 9 by legislating detracking (destreaming) in grade 9 (the start of high school), defining a common curriculum in broad, outcome-based terms, and promoting interdisciplinary study and alternative...
forms of assessment. At Stewart Heights, although the guidance department, along with younger teachers and researchers in the humanities and minority subjects, supported the reforms, others were skeptical or cynical. Commenting on the detracking policy, for example, a female math teacher in her 40s said,

I hated it because I got a class of 27 students who didn’t know what a division sign looked like. I think it was not fair for both upper- and lower-end students. The upper-end students just zipped by and the lower-end students faded away after the second week. You knew they were dying in math and they could not do anything. They just sat there and it could be a big disturbance. I don’t like destreaming for that reason.

Although some teachers dealt with the diverse levels of ability in de-tracked classes by offering alternative assignments, adapting the seating arrangements, or teaching two distinct lessons within the same class period, many teachers of high-status subjects who defined them as having a linear structure, however, found it hard to move away from teaching secondary school classes together at one pace as a unit. One former French teacher at Stewart Heights, now in her 50s, recalled how detracking caused her department to provide a “watered-down” program so as to prevent struggling students from failing.

I found it distressing to have to try to teach a class with that broad range of abilities the same stuff, and I was very aware that the material was too hard for the lower half of the class. Even though I had several years of experience as an elementary teacher, I was not able to do a differentiated program for two or three different ability levels. They can’t function for very long [in French] all on their own, particularly at the grade 9 level. And so I found it very upsetting to see our grade 9 program watered down, semester after semester, in order to avoid high failure rates.

Just as important as the content of the reforms were their interconnected and cumulative effects. Teachers with long careers do not experience reforms in isolation but in interrelationship. A snapshot event that replaces bad with good for policy makers is a long-term, historical, and career-long process for teachers that has cumulative meaning and impact for them (Huberman, 1993). The three decades encapsulated by our Change Over Time? study were ones of repeated policy reversals. In Ontario, the highly student-centered Hall-Dennis report era of the 1960s and 1970s (Hall & Dennis, 1968), with its emphasis on child-centered learning, discovery, and inquiry, was followed by increased subject emphasis and tightening of credit require-
ments (OSIS) alongside inclusive special education legislation in the 1980s, then superseded by the new socialist government’s emphasis on an interdisciplinary common curriculum and detracking in the early 1990s (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1995), turning again to a standards-based, subject-defined, content-loaded, and high-stakes tested curriculum in the late 1990s and beyond (Gidney, 1999). In the United States, the Johnsonian era that spawned free schools and schools without walls in an era of women’s liberation and civil rights was followed in the early 1980s by the bellicose language of “A Nation at Risk” (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) juxtaposed with legislation introducing magnet schools (Henig, 1994) and special education inclusion (Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act), moving on to statewide initiatives in common learning outcomes and alternative portfolio assessments, and finally, from the mid-1990s, to an ever-tightening orientation toward standardization, content-based curricula, and high-stakes testing, which culminated in the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). These cumulative policy reversals led teachers with mature lives and longer careers to experience reforms as swings of a pendulum that made wholesale commitment ultimately futile—unless the reforms in question aligned with and furthered their own values, interests, and identities. Cycles of change for policy makers last no more than the 5 years defined by electoral cycles. For teachers, they last almost a lifetime (Huberman, 1993).

For instance, some of Stewart Heights’ teachers who had lived through years of educational reform were now, toward the end of their careers, resigned to disconnecting from the process. “I’m trying to just ignore it. I’m just not letting my head or my heart get involved in all the crap that is going on around me, all the negative talk. I don’t want to deal with it,” said a 50-something female French teacher who had been teaching for 31 years. I’ve seen enough things happen, OSIS and all the rest of it coming through. They always promise that it’s gonna be radically different and it never really is. I’m not allowing myself to get upset about it. I just want it to pass me by.

Older teachers learned to become cautious and to keep their focus on the classroom. Looking back over her career, a Stewart Heights school librarian who was approaching retirement said,

I remember when the Hall-Dennis report came out and everybody was all hot to trot about it and the implications. I said, “Hey, just wait, go into the classroom and do the best job that you can.” I’m very much a wait-and-see person.
Describing her membership on the school’s current committee to implement Secondary School Reform, she observed that “we’re all kind of sitting on the cliff waiting to see what’s going to happen.”

Waves of reform are experienced by teachers not only as cumulative but also as contradictory. This was especially true in both countries in the 1980s and early 1990s—between the age of innovation and optimism that characterized the 1970s and the age of globalization and standardization that took deep root from the mid-1990s (Goodson, in press). This intervening period or interregnum of the 1980s was one in which meanings and missions from the two ages of innovation and standardization jostled with each other for integration, coexistence, or simple supremacy. Caught in the middle of these competing missions and their meanings, Ontario teachers were left trying to reconcile open-ended outcomes with detailed subject standards, alternative assessments with traditional report cards, and increased student autonomy over learning and assessment with decreased teacher autonomy over what to implement and how (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001).

In the American schools, teachers engaged with portfolio assessments alongside the tightening screw of conventionally tested subject achievements and graduation requirements, teachers in Barrett Magnet tried to keep excellence in the inner city while being required to include children with a range of disabilities under special education legislation, and teachers acceded to contracts that gave them improved pay and working conditions in exchange for compliance with and commitment to reform demands. In both countries, almost all teachers found these contradictions enervating and exasperating, and their commitment to change weakened as their inventiveness was eventually overcome and their energy could no longer be sustained.

Leadership Succession

One of the most significant events in the life of a school that is most likely to bring about a sizeable shift in direction is a change of leadership. Although waves of reform exert the greatest and most immediate pressures on whole systems, it is changes of leaders and leadership that most directly and dramatically provoke change in individual schools.

Throughout the three decades encompassed by the study, leadership successions were always emotionally intense events. At Lord Byron and Durant, teachers mourned the loss of charismatic leaders and worried (rightly) if anyone would be able to fill their shoes. They felt betrayed on those occasions when their departing leaders took some of their best staff members with them, as happened when one charismatic principal left Talisman Park (see Fink and Brayman’s article). By comparison, when authoritarian or
bureaucratic leaders were succeeded by ones with a more human touch, which occurred in Talisman Park and Stewart Heights, the overwhelming feeling was one of relief. Leadership succession is, in this sense, almost always an emotionally intense episode in the life of a school. It is a critical event that calls for careful management.

Fink and Brayman’s article in this volume shows how leadership succession can be planned or unplanned and foster continuity or discontinuity in a school’s path of change. Its analysis reveals how there were very few examples of planned continuity in the project schools, whereby improving schools were allocated a new leader who would build on past achievements to move the school further forward. The most successful instances of succession—all in the innovative settings of Durant, Blue Mountain, and Lord Byron—were when insiders were groomed to follow their leader’s footsteps and furthered their achievements within the culture of the school. In the slightly more common instances of planned discontinuity, new leaders such as Bill Andrews at Stewart Heights typically had initial success in turning their schools around but did not stay long enough to embed the improvements and make them sustainable. Most instances of succession, as Fink and Brayman’s article shows, were a combination of unplanned continuity and discontinuity—discontinuity with or truncation of the last principal’s achievements and reversion to continuity with the mediocrity that preceded them. Few things, our data suggest, succeed less than leadership succession. In general, successions are poorly planned. They are more a reaction to events, as leaders get promoted or retire, than a thoughtful attempt to create sustainable improvement that stretches beyond individual leaders.

One reason for poor succession is the kind of knowledge that principals and systems use during the succession process. Drawing on Wenger (1998), it seems that three kinds of knowledge are drawn on during the succession process. Inbound knowledge is the knowledge of leadership or a particular school that is needed to change it, make one’s mark on it, turn it around. Insider knowledge is the knowledge one gains from and exercises with other members of the community after becoming known, trusted, and accepted by them. Outbound knowledge is the knowledge needed to preserve past successes, keep improvement going, and leave a legacy after one has left.

The Change Over Time? project data are dominated by schools’ and systems’ preoccupations with inbound knowledge—with initiating and imposing changes rather than looking back and consolidating existing ones. In the later years covered by our work, almost no principal stayed long enough to acquire the status of trusted insider. And outbound knowledge was only fully considered by three of the innovative schools—Durant, Lord Byron, and Blue Mountain—when each groomed an assistant principal as a likely
successor to the incumbent principal to continue promoting the leader’s and school’s vision. Creating extensively distributed leadership (Spillane & Halverson, 2001) also added to these principals’ successful outbound trajectories. It was the whole staff, not just one successor, who were able to move the school into its next phase of development. On the evidence of this project, the sustainability of school improvement and reform initiatives is repeatedly undermined by excessive emphasis on the inbound knowledge of leadership at the expense of equally important outbound concerns.

In the past decade, the change force of leadership succession has become magnified by the accelerating pace and frequency of successions themselves. The rapid demographic turnover of leaders as the baby boomer generation retires, a rush to early retirement precipitated by standardized reform pressures, and increasing pressures on school districts to bring about rapid improvement in underperforming schools is creating instability and non-sustainability in school leadership (Association of California School Administrators, 2001; National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, 2002). In the latest period of their history, all our schools show how leaders are now typically changing schools fewer than every 5 years before they can become accepted insiders. Inbound knowledge is everything, improvement efforts are repeatedly cut short, and sustainability is the casualty. In this accelerating carousel of principal succession, the principals spin around and around while the schools just go up and down (Hargreaves, Fink, Moore, Brayman, & White, 2003). Principals rotate through schools and teachers endure, waiting their leaders out—ensuring that unplanned continuity and discontinuity will be the consequence of most succession events and that teacher resistance to change will become entrenched (MacMillan, 2000). As the current principal of Stewart Heights said, having replaced his predecessor who had stayed for just 3 years, “It’s only been 1-plus years [of his tenure at the school], but teachers are coming to me already and asking how long am I going to be here.”

During the three decades of the Change Over Time? study, not only have leaders changed but so has the nature of leadership itself. Fink and Brayman show in their article that, until the mid- to late 1970s, leaders were remembered as larger-than-life characters (in a good or a bad way) who knew people in the school, were closely identified with it, made their mark on it, and stayed around for many years to see things through.

In the early to mid-80s, the most creative leaders in the project’s most innovative schools motivated and assisted their staff to work through the reform paradoxes that defined the period (Hargreaves, 1995) by building cultures of collaboration and by twisting and channeling the reforms to advance their schools’ own purposes. By comparison, less effective leaders like the
leadership at Stewart Heights in this period simply tried to shield their teach-
ers from the intensifying reform demands and, as a result, left their schools to
drift. In the words of Stewart Heights’ own leader at that time,

One of the difficulties I found for my personal approach to leadership was that I
didn’t have a particular direction or goal for my school. I simply wanted to fa-
cilitate the relationship between teachers and students, and I thought my job
was to take as much of the adminstrivia, and annoyance and pressure from out-
side sources off the teachers so that they could work effectively with kids.

From the mid- to late 1990s, however, teachers were seeing their leaders
as being more like anonymous managers who had less visibility in the school,
seemed to be more attached to the system or their own careers than the long-
term interests of the school, and, because of accelerating succession, rarely
remained long enough to ensure that their initiatives would last. The pres-
sures on the urban principalship of No Child Left Behind legislation, in
which one of the prescribed options for repeated annual failure to improve in-
volves removal of the principal, is likely to exacerbate these tendencies even
further (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In all these senses, school
leadership remains a common force for bringing about short-term change but
because of succession rates and problems, mainly fails to fulfill its capacity to
secure sustainable improvement.

Student and Community Demographics

Schools change over time in their student composition and in the commu-
nities they serve. Almost all the project’s school cases have been affected by
multicultural immigration, by internal migration or “White flight” in Ameri-
can cities, by shifts in school size as local family populations shrink or swell,
and by regulations such as the Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act
(U.S. Department of Education, 1997), along with other tendencies that
increase inclusion in regular schools and that encourage more students to
stay in school when they may previously have exited earlier.

There are differences between the United States and Canada in their actual
experiences and ideological representations of how they respond to race and
diversity. Americans widely subscribe to a “melting pot” or assimilationist
ideology whereby successive waves of immigrants are absorbed into a com-
mon identity (Gibson, 1988). Yet the mythical nature of this melting pot ide-
ology has been highlighted by writers who point to the fact that many Ameri-
cans regard themselves as having hyphenated identities (Booth, 1998). In
practice, American cities have largely become characterized by strict racial
and residential segregation, compounded by growing gaps between wealth and poverty. The American city is urban and problematic, unlike the Western European city, which is more typically urbane and culturally diverse (Popkewitz, 1998). In the urban school district in which the project’s three U.S. schools were located, only 18% of it was populated by minorities in 1970, compared to 41% in 1990 and 57% in 1999. These trends were even more exaggerated in school district figures where minority populations leapt from 37% in 1970 to 73% in 1990 and 82% in 1999 (see Baker & Foote in this volume).

In Canada, the widespread belief is that the country is a complex mosaic of different cultures, races, and identities (Adler, 1974; R. J. F. Day, 2000). Constitutionally, Canada is officially a bilingual and multicultural nation. With a lesser legacy of slavery in historical and numerical terms and without the experience of large populations of cheap, minority labor moving from an adjacent country across its border, more of Canada’s minority population compared to the United States is what Ogbu (1993) has described as a voluntary, rather than involuntary one. This is reflected in more overt drives to succeed educationally within the terms of the dominant culture.

Even so, Canada is by no means immune to racial and residential segregation. The school district in which Blue Mountain and Lord Byron is located, for example, is the third wealthiest in Canada and has an overwhelmingly White student population and surrounding community. There is scarcely a minority teacher to be found in the entire district, and there are no minorities at all in the district office. By contrast, the metropolitan district in which Talisman Park and Stewart Heights are located has experienced massive urban expansion and a great increase in minority populations in the past 15 years. Census data for this region indicate that the immigrant proportion of the total population increased from 32% in 1986 to 43% in 2001. Between 1991 and 1996, the largest net declines proportionately in immigrants were Yugoslav (–55%), British (–33%), French (–32%), German (–21%), and Dutch (–12%), with the greatest proportionate increases being East Indian (65%), Croatian (57%), Vietnamese (54%), Polish (53%), Chinese (50%), and Black (50%). During the period of data collection, the district was led by a Caribbean-born superintendent and had another Caribbean-born educator as an assistant principal at Stewart Heights. In minority terms, though, these individuals were administrative exceptions. At Stewart Heights, a teacher with 33 years of service in the school commented,

I remember there was one Black staff member in the early years and that was it and hardly any ethnic groups of students, but that certainly changed over the years. By the time I finished teaching [in 1998], in my last accounting class I
had about 30 kids in it, and one day one of the boys said to me, “Miss, do you realize you’re the only White person in this room?” And I hadn’t thought about it, but I was.

Her colleague with 36 years experience in the school elaborated when she recalled going

into the school about 2 months after I retired and I just went through the halls at lunch hour. I could have sworn that I was in Bombay. There were so many East Indians there—more than any other group. While I was walking through the hallway that particular day, I hardly saw a White face.

These demographic shifts in student and community populations precipitated internal and external change in six of the project schools and also colored how teachers dealt with it. Teachers and schools largely responded conscientiously to increased diversity with programs to capture students’ interests and with clubs like the Unity Group at Stewart Heights to strengthen their sense of belonging. In the U.S. urban school district, magnet school initiatives such as Barrett Magnet were introduced to keep the brightest minority students and their families in the city. But although many teachers were used to and enthusiastic about collaborating about their teaching, they did not normally address students’ diversity by having conversations about and responding to their learning (Delpit, 1995). As a result, increased diversity and poverty were often seen as bringing about problems of lower standards and deteriorating behavior that had their origins solely in the students and their families and not also in the teaching and learning practices of the schools. This is very evident, for example, at Sheldon High School (described in Baker and Foote’s article). At Stewart Heights, continuous observations of the School Climate Committee indicated that over time, it had initially responded to problems of student misbehavior by reviewing the curriculum and strengthening the school as a community. After the impact of Secondary School Reform in the late 1990s, however, when teachers were overloaded with implementation and had less time to spend with students, the School Climate Committee began to blame students themselves for increasing misbehavior and merely tightened up behavioral codes and other demands for compliance in response.

Teacher Generations

Teaching and change in schools are driven by a generational center of gravity, a dominant demographic of teachers who are of a particular age and career stage. This tends to have its identity formed and consolidated in the
early (but not the earliest) stages of the career in ways that bear and absorb the
themes and missions of that time and for which, in later years, teachers expe-
rience yearning and nostalgia. Goodson, Moore, and Hargreaves’s article,
which this section summarizes, shows how understanding change, and how
teachers support or resist it, is not simply a matter of teachers’ age or even
their career stage (Huberman, 1992, 1993) but also of the generational mis-
sions of teaching and the demographic forces that shape them. For mid- and
late-career teachers especially, teacher change and resistance to it is as much
about generation as degeneration.

The teachers in our sample who were part of the baby boomer generation
were, in general, the numerically dominant and often most politically influ-
ential group in their schools throughout their careers. They were formidable
forces of change and also, especially later, of resistance to it. Their gener-
ational missions crystallized in the early years of their careers. Many of these
teachers recalled their younger, energetic, hopeful, and more idealistic selves
in early career as ones that were defined not only by optimism and fun but
also by the social justice missions of the period that they bore: to make a dif-
ference in the world at large as well as in individual children’s lives. They
remembered their schools as smaller, family-like institutions and their work
as being characterized by professional autonomy and the freedom to inno-
vate in ways that enabled them to give their students their best.

At the same time, the 1960s/70s teachers’ generation mourned the loss of
schools as communal environments free from racial strife, students who
came to class ready and able to learn, and stable communities that reflected
and supported the values of schooling. Part of this sense of loss was for stu-
dents and communities who learned better, behaved better, and were easier to
teach. These nostalgic reflections on the past were intensified by compari-
sions against current trends of growing cultural diversity, increasing poverty,
and White flight that seemed to make many of today’s students too demand-
ing to teach.

Stewart Heights teachers, for example, reflected on how their school had
been a “village school” when it opened in 1958, dealing with “farm kids”
who were “down to earth,” “easy to handle,” and “pleasant to talk to.” Al-
though the school at that time also catered to more demanding “city kids”
from a nearly “factory town,” the school then was recalled as a small one with
a strong school spirit. Another teacher reflected how

they used to really focus tremendously on school spirit and had cheerleaders
and football teams and a lot of organized spirit days. That hasn’t happened in
several years, and I really couldn’t tell you why, but maybe it’s because the
school population is too large. I think it’s sad in a way because we like to teach
loyalty to not just the family one belongs to but also to their affiliations—in this case, the school. It doesn’t seem to be there as much as it used to be.

Other Stewart Heights teachers believed that increased choices for after-school activities, the growth of part-time jobs that seemed to take precedence over everything, study commitments, or plain apathy were responsible for the decline in school spirit. One view that no one (except the principal) expressed, however, was that this “lack of school spirit” and consistent increases in suspensions, violence, and drug use among some students in the 1990s might have reflected the staff’s inability to connect with their changing students.

In the later years of their careers, as they aged, dramatic socioeconomic and racial shifts, the accelerating carousel of principal succession, and increasing centralization and standardization in the district and the state or province weakened the capacity of teachers and leaders in the more innovative schools to maintain the structures and cultures that had inspired them at the beginning of their careers. In an attempt to slow, or reverse, the process of “degeneration” in public schooling that they perceive, and to defend the missions and practices to which they have committed their careers, this generation has become increasingly antagonistic toward and embittered about external and internal changes that, in their eyes, threaten to destroy all they believe in and have committed themselves to achieving for their students and their schools. They feel social nostalgia for the broader missions and purposes that standardized policy has seemingly stolen from them and political nostalgia for their lost professional autonomy.

The emerging generation of teachers that is demographically replacing their baby boomer predecessors has not yet developed any memory or nostalgia. The present conveys no sense of loss for them, as there is no past to compare it against (Evans, 2000). As a teacher in his 60s at Stewart Heights observed,

I think what’s going to happen is as new teachers come into the system, they won’t know what we had before, and so they won’t miss it. But I think the people who are working now who have been in the system for a number of years will feel a sense of frustration.

Reform environments are interpreted neither cynically nor stoically by the incoming teacher generation but are accepted simply as the facts of life of teaching. The life missions of these teachers seem less grand, more circumscribed. Teaching is animated less by great social missions than by the personal quest to make a difference in individual lives. These new professionals
(Troman, 2000) are technically at ease with information technology and new assessments and comfortable with mandated curriculum content. In a Stewart Heights teacher’s eyes, these newer teachers “have incredible enthusiasm and energy . . . they [don’t] look ruffled and seem to be managing in their new roles.” They are more assertive about their own learning and career needs and more vigilant about protecting the boundary that separates their work from their lives. They do, however, resent the process of reform when it actively undermines their professional image and working conditions, and they dislike the surrounding culture of cynicism and embitterment among older colleagues that standardized reform has created. These factors alone were leading many younger Canadian teachers in the sample to plan early exits from the profession. One of them at Stewart Heights said that “as a young teacher, I am disheartened by this environment and will move on professionally to the private sector. There is no joy in teaching—only a paper trail of grief.”

The lessons of studying the baby boomer generation—and how its early missions and experiences shaped the profession they dominated for 30 years—need to be transferred to what Europeans call the “professional formation” of the incoming generation. How legislated reform is managed in these few short years will almost certainly tint and perhaps even taint the fundamental character of teaching and the sense of mission in public education for the next three decades.

**School Interrelations**

Schools are not all the same; neither are they islands. Schools affect one another across space as well as time. Barrett Magnet school coexisted next to, and also at the expense of, its self-stigmatized “special education magnet” neighbor, Sheldon High. Three of the project’s innovative schools—Durant, Lord Byron, and Blue Mountain—were constantly competing and being compared against their surrounding and more traditional counterparts. As Baker and Foote argue in their article, change over time is a matter of social geography as well as social history.

This has always been true; now it is even more so. In an age of globalization and standardization, schools are becoming more like quasi-markets (Whitty et al., 1998). Principles of privatization or specialist emphasis are promoting greater choice between schools such as Barrett Magnet and its neighbors as the market separates and also connects schools and students who are chosen from those who are not. At the time of writing, the district in which the three U.S. schools are located has introduced the idea that all high schools must define and compete within a market of specialist emphasis.
At the same time, the abstract forces of standardization are reasserting the traditional grammar of schooling and undermining the capacity of schools to be truly different. The defense of innovative identities under these circumstances turns into a struggle to protect distinctive, alternative, and even rebellious spaces against the tightening grip of standardization and the competitive forces of the market—by forging networks and alliances within the community as well as far beyond the district and the state (as in the case of Durant described by Giles & Hargreaves and also by Baker & Foote).

Change over time is, in this sense, an historical process of tightening interrelations among schools across space in which space and status are increasingly intertwined.

The vocabulary for space and status is remarkably similar—in/out, up/down, central/peripheral (Stallybrass & White, 1986). Figure 1 reflects Acker’s (2000) characterization of primary schools in one hilly and socially stratified English city as, in the eyes of their teachers, either “up,” “down,” or “out.” In the present study, schools that are “up” or “down” have more conventional identities that largely conform to the grammar of schooling but also serve communities of greater or lesser wealth and status. Innovative schools that are “out” depart from this traditional grammar. Over time, the four schools in the project that conformed closely to the existing grammar moved up and down to differing degrees: Talisman Park and Stewart Heights lost a little status and Sheldon lost a great deal more as it encountered increasing student diversity, whereas Barrett moved spectacularly in the other direction after assuming its magnet identity. Across three decades, none of the schools moved “out” to depart from the existing grammar. By contrast, escalating competition from neighboring schools and recent forces of standardization...
and marketization pulled all the innovative schools in—with technical East-side adopting the International Baccalaureate, Durant reducing its curriculum to implement a standardized one under downsized conditions, Blue Mountain having to implement diluted and recycled government versions of reforms it had initially invented, and Lord Byron being absorbed downward by a forced merger with a vocational school. It is clear that efforts to secure sustainable improvement or substantial innovation can only be properly judged in terms of the environmental relations of space, status, and social justice (or its absence) that schools have with others around them (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004, in press).

PERIODIZATION OF CHANGE

Just as tides, currents, wind patterns, and geology converge at particular points in time to produce the greatest tides in the world in Nova Scotia’s Bay of Fundy, the five change forces converge at specific historical moments to create overarching and overwhelming waves of educational change. These moments of convergence mark the beginning and the end of definite historical periods in the life of schools. So consistent are these emergent patterns, across the varied schools in our study, that they point to a compelling periodization of educational change in both countries.

The classical economic writings of Kondratiev (1923), as well as more recent economic and technology analyses (Freeman & Louçã, 2001; Perez, 1983; Young, 1988), show that cycles of economic growth have long waves that extend beyond short upswings and downswings and that drive and define social policy movements—with profitable cycles creating the resources that facilitate public investment and long recessions leading to erosions of the state infrastructure (Goodson, in press).

The Change Over Time? study shows that in addition to these influential economic cycles that have the most direct impact on policy are equally important demographic ones, whereby numerically dominant demographic groups like the baby boomers define the missions and also create as well as consume the resources of their times (Foote, 1996). Student demographics, teacher demographics, and leadership demographics were three of the key converging change forces revealed by this study. Economic factors were expressed in policy reforms and in the growth of market relations among schools. Economics and demographics are the two major societal forces that drive the historical and generational periodization of educational change over time. Three periods emerged as distinct and definable ages of public
education across all the cases in the study: periods of optimism and innovation, complexity and contradiction, and standardization and marketization.

In the first clear period, running up to the mid-  to late 1970s, a large, young, baby-boom cohort of energetic and enthusiastic teachers pursued change as a process of self-generated innovation within a wider sense of teaching as a world-changing social mission. In societal terms, the period extending up to the mid-1970s was one that historian Hobsbawm (1995) described as the “Golden Age” of history. This was a time of booming demographics and a buoyant economy when there was massive state investment in numerous initiatives, such America’s war on poverty and its educational Head Start program, and when debates in social theory focused on whether this investment state was a way to realize the social mission of democracy or a means of buying off social protest (Miliband, 1978). In this age of optimism and innovation, booming demographics and economic expansion led to reforms and large-scale projects that emphasized teacher-generated innovation and student-centered forms of learning. As one veteran Stewart Heights teacher recalled it, it was the “golden age of education; there was money and respect and all kinds of things happening.” In this period, school staff rooms were often remembered as places of energy and conviviality where teachers gave each other advice and talked about students and curriculum as well as their lives outside school. School leaders were remembered as larger-than-life figures (in a good or bad way) who were emotionally attached to their schools, stayed with them, and placed their stamp on them. The student population was relatively homogenous in ethnic and racial terms in Canada and more socially mixed in America—this period being one that preceded extensive immigration from non-European countries as well as internal White migration out of the American city. Many special needs students were not yet included in ordinary secondary schools, and many older, less academic students exited early into the workplace. Teacher nostalgia for this period was, therefore, one of either teaching academic students or transforming the lives of White, working-class ones in an age of teacher autonomy and self-generated innovation when professional commitment meant realizing the enthusiasms of youth.

The late 1970s to mid-1990s was a transitional age of complexity and contradiction. This age marked the formal decline of traditional social democracy and the belief in Keynesian investment in a “social wage” as a way to alleviate hardship and to create consumer spending power. As the legacy of social democracy struggled with an emerging ideology of a smaller investment state and a free market economy, the world was experienced and theorized as an age of chaos (Gleick, 1987), complexity (Waldrop, 1992),
paradox (Handy, 1994), and postmodern uncertainty (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Lyotard, 1984). A few years later, these themes were reflected in a lagging literature of educational administration that emphasized how to live on the edge of chaos (Fullan, 1993), work with paradox (Deal & Peterson, 1995), and respond to postmodern uncertainty (Hargreaves, 1994). This period was one of great unevenness and variation among the project’s schools and their teachers as they appeared to be adapting to and settling into a new pattern while struggling to preserve the ideals of the old. In this age of complexity and contradiction, teachers struggled with contradictory reform imperatives (McNeil, 2000), such as portfolios alongside standardized tests, interdisciplinary initiatives with subject-based standards, and distributed leadership coupled with downsized decision making, and many became increasingly exhausted and exasperated as they did so. The more innovative schools that had inspirational leadership during this period were able to help their teachers work with and through the contradictions, steering a complex course that preserved their missions while still addressing the standards. Meanwhile, the long-standing traditional schools—Sheldon, Talisman Park, and Stewart Heights—drifted into gradual decline as their leaders tried to protect their staffs from reform measures so they could continue to teach as they chose.

A third period commences in and extends from the mid-1990s. This age of standardization and marketization reveals how, out of the confusion of postmodernity, a new world order has emerged, marked by the triumph of economic and cultural globalization (Bauman, 1998; Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998; Giddens, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Soros, 2002). Although the triumph is not limitless, this is an age in which the world’s economies are ever more integrated, where information is instant, cultural and commercial trends are more Westernized and homogenized, life is moving faster, insecurity is everywhere, and community relationships are in rapid decline (Reich, 2001; Sennett, 1998). The collapse of trust (Fukuyama, 2000; O’Neill, 2002) because of the loss of relationships and the manipulation of public life by media sound bytes has replaced community responsibility with contract-driven standards of public accountability and substituted personal relationships with market-based and performance-driven interactions (Hargreaves, 2003). In education, this has led to new global orthodoxies of educational change (Hargreaves et al., 2001), promoted by international financial organizations, where markets and standardization, accountability and performance targets, high-stakes testing and intrusive intervention are at the heart of almost all reform efforts.

In this age of standardization and marketization, the aging boomer cohort has become increasingly cynical about successive, accelerating waves of
contradictory reforms that have culminated in systems of standardization that are eroding teacher autonomy, narrowing the curriculum, and undermining the idea of teaching as a broader social mission. Overwhelmed by implementation requirements and intensified work demands in a downsized system characterized by escalating performance requirements and diminishing support, staff rooms in the project schools have become increasingly empty as teachers have snatched whatever time they can together to deal with the urgency of implementation. In this period, school leaders who move with increasing speed around the accelerating carousel of leadership succession are regarded as behaving more like managers than leaders and as being more attached to the district and their own career prospects within it, rather than to the future of their school. The student population is more inclusive of students who teachers find challenging—more culturally diverse in Canadian schools and more ethnoculturally as well as socioeconomically concentrated and segregated in the American city. The post-1995 period is also one of intensifying teacher nostalgia for innovative, autonomous, and heroic younger selves pursuing broader social missions with more homogeneous groups of motivated students who responded to their efforts. This nostalgia is contrasted with an embittered present of lost autonomy and community, mandated requirements, culturally different students who seem both harder to motivate and less well served by standardized reform patterns, and leaders who have sold their schools and their souls to the district.

These three periods of reform, which emerged and converged on a case-by-case basis through the analysis of project data, provide a compelling case for understanding educational change as not only a universal and generic process, nor even as a cyclical one, but as a process that is also ultimately shaped by the great historical, economic, and demographic movements of our times. History and politics must move to the center of educational change theory and research in educational administration if change is not to be misunderstood and misrepresented as only a forward moving, largely technical, and politically neutral process.

STRUCTURE, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

The five change forces and their periodization have a compelling influence on the structure, culture, and identity of schools and on efforts to change them over time. In the Change Over Time? sample, schools with a traditional historical grammar or structure persisted largely intact or with only temporary interruptions throughout repeated waves of reform. Notwithstanding switches to semestered schedules in two Ontario cases and the increasing
inclusion of special education students in all, initiatives in interdisciplinary teaching or detracking came and went, and the changes that remained involved tinkering with credit requirements rather than fundamentally reorganizing curriculum, teaching, and learning to meet the needs of all students.

In line with Tyack and Tobin’s (1994) thesis, those changes that did persist were ones that aligned with or even tightened the existing grammar of schooling. The elite associations of Barrett Magnet school successfully stemmed some of the bright flight to the suburbs. In the scramble for survival brought about by declining student demographics and increases in school choice, the introduction of the International Baccalaureate added images of rigor and respectability to the curriculum offerings of several project schools.

Most of all, the standards-based reform movement of the 1990s in both countries tightened the grip of the traditional grammar of schooling through increased testing, through reaffirming the priority of high-status subjects, through increased demands for content coverage, and through reinstating and reinforcing the power of departmental decision making. Other parts of the reform movement such as portfolio assessments, mentoring programs for students, and more personalized career counseling were squeezed to the sides by these high-stakes imperatives. At Stewart Heights, for example, personal career counseling was dealt with in whole school assembly sessions.

Four of the schools in the sample were included because, in different ways, they explicitly challenged the existing grammar of schooling. Their innovative identities were sources of inspiration in efforts to resist, subvert, or reduce the impact of the reforms that reinstalled more traditional definitions of schooling. Yet these identities also made the schools vulnerable to seeming not like “real” schools (Metz, 1991) at all in relation to their more conventional competitors and compared to the thrust of these reforms. Even when schools lost their innovative edge, their deep-seated identities lived on as stigmatizing myths that overshadowed their efforts to compete with the mainstream.

All four innovative schools were placed under pressure by the 1990s agenda of increasing standardization. As Giles and Hargreaves’s article reveals, Lord Byron experienced a gradual and seemingly predictable attrition of change that had afflicted many innovative schools before it. This attrition of change occurred because of aging staff, loss of leaders, withdrawal of resources, mistrust among the community, and shifts of district focus (Fink, 2000; Sarason, 1972; Smith et al., 1986; Smith et al., 1987; Smith et al., 1988). By the start of the 21st century, what remained of the school’s innovative identity made it the district’s most likely candidate for amalgamation with a vocational school and, accordingly, for absorption into the lower status sector, beneath the reach of standardization.
Blue Mountain, established as a learning community, successfully used learning organization principles and structures to resist the predictable forces of attrition of change. As Giles and Hargreaves show, it anticipated and solved attritional problems like leadership succession, staff renewal, and relationships with other schools when and even before they emerged. Yet in the face of standardized reform and the deterioration of teachers’ working conditions, this school eventually started to succumb to the external pressure as teachers lost the time to meet and learn, were no longer able to survive off past planning (their initial response), began to burn themselves out in efforts to maintain their distinctive mission, and started to feel that their once-loved leader who talked up change while implementing unwanted reforms was betraying them. Moreover, although innovations like the student mentoring program that the school initiated were sometimes adopted as government policy, once they were legislated, they were then recycled back into the school with reduced resources that made them unworkable in the very school that had invented them. On this evidence, schools that are learning organizations seem able to halt the evolutionary attrition of change but not to stem the tide of standardization.

Eastside technical and commercial school sought respectability by introducing the International Baccalaureate. Paradoxically, it was also able to maintain much of its distinctive edge by exploiting external support for computer-based learning and integrating it with the school’s long-standing commercial and artistic tradition. Such entrepreneurial initiative may enable schools to find allies in parts of the business sector that can shield them from the pressures to promote standardization.

Another answer to preserving innovation in an era of standards-based reform is that of activism. Durant alternative school has protected and reinvented much of its distinctive mission not just because of its commitment to innovative and autonomous teaching but also because of its broader struggle for social justice. Activism, advocacy, and vigilance in defense of the school’s students and their teaching and learning needs have led to pressures being placed on the board and to protests outside its offices. Support has also being gained from participation in the Coalition of Essential Schools and in an activist coalition for alternative performance standards. These networks and alliances helped the school to experience temporary successes in securing exceptions and waivers from systemic standards requirements. The attrition of change may be able to be halted by principles of internal learning community, but only the addition of external activism and entrepreneurial initiative may be able to raise standards while resisting, at least temporarily, some of the effects of standardization. Even so, through the years of
standardization, in physical as well as curricular terms, Durant has become more and more like the conventional schools around it.

An essential element of learning communities as well as activist forms of professionalism (Sachs, 2000) is teachers' commitment and capacity to collaborate with one another. The collective research wisdom about the culture of teaching is that in the 1970s, it was characterized by presentism, conservatism, and individualism (Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 1984, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). Yet most of these claims are based on data drawn from elementary school settings. By contrast, the recollections of Cohort 1 teachers in the Change Over Time? study were of the 1970s and even some years beyond that being a time when school staff rooms were full and lively and when teachers talked and planned together, shared information about students, received advice and informal mentoring from more senior colleagues, and simply enjoyed the social pleasures, the conviviality of each other’s company—outside the school as well as within it.

Since that time, the cumulative and intensifying effects of successive reform movements have emptied school staff rooms. Accelerating reform demands, the ever-increasing demand for higher standards, the expansion of administrative responsibility, the continuous emphasis on performance, and most recently, in Ontario, the reduction in teachers’ scheduled time outside classroom teaching, have replaced the informal collaborations of a more organic community with what Sennett (1998) called a turnstile world of transient teamwork (also Hargreaves, 2003), where teachers frantically rush through meetings to dispatch the requirements of reform implementation. For example, one Stewart Heights teacher who said she had spent lots of time in the staff room in her early years had only been there five times in the past 15. Another bemoaned the fact that “there has not been the pedagogical discussion that there used to be [because] we have been consumed and are being consumed by the political thing [of the reform mandates].”

Contrary to the advocacy literature on professional learning communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), although schools may be experiencing a growth in task-focused and implementation-centered learning teams, most are becoming less like authentic learning communities. In our study, standardization is proving to be the ultimate enemy of enduring innovation and sustainable learning communities.

CONCLUSION

Studying change during 30 years in eight schools and two countries has enabled the Change Over Time? project to begin to discern what factors are
important in securing or undermining the sustainability of change efforts. Most references to how to sustain change or improvement in educational administration trivialize the concept of sustainability and equate it with maintainability or how to make things last. Yet, in line with the classic definition of environmental sustainability outlined in the report of the Brundtland Commission (1987) on sustainable development, in which development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” the key principles of sustainable improvement appear to be that sustainable improvement focuses on what matters, that makes improvement last and spread, and that achieves its ends without doing harm to others around it (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004, 2006).

The Change Over Time? project demonstrates the importance and necessity of taking a historical perspective on educational change if change efforts are to be sustainable achievements rather than matters of only transient interest. The evidence in the ensuing articles highlights the need for more change theory and change advocacy in educational administration to take seriously Sarason’s (1990) injunction to become more politically critical and more historically aware. Among researchers, change needs to be viewed in the rearview mirror of reflection and not just placed in the service of policy makers’ driving ambition for political success. Sustainability of educational improvement, in its fullest sense, is unlikely to occur without a theory and a strategy that is more historically and politically informed. Focusing on and exercising leadership to secure deep learning and not just tested achievement for all students; developing clearer processes and administrative plans that will ease the problems of accelerated leadership succession; engaging with the strengths of teachers’ generational missions rather than treating them with administrative disdain as only negative sources of resistance among a degenerating teaching force; finding ways to make teaching and learning more vivid and real for the increasing number of students in cultural minorities and in poverty; not overinvesting in model schools, magnet schools, or discretionary initiatives to the cost of those around them; turning schools and districts into more activist professional learning communities; retaining standards but refraining from standardization; and treating history and experience as strengths to be drawn on rather than obstacles to be overcome in the quest for improvement—these are the implications of the Change Over Time? study for securing truly sustainable improvement for all students that matters, spreads, and lasts.
NOTES

1. The original nine change forces were identified as “tracks” (or pathways) of educational change that appeared to run through all the schools across the different periods. These were (a) successive waves of reform, (b) stages of teacher response, (c) changing teacher demographics, (d) changing student demographics, (e) patterns of leadership succession, (f) school reputations and myths, (g) schools’ prior experiences of change, (h) local geographies of educational change, (i) alignment of reform efforts with the existing grammar of schooling. Items b and c coalesced into the nature and effect of teacher demographics. Item h was recast because of the persuasiveness of the empirical data as a specific aspect of local geography-school interrelations. Items f, g, and i were seen to be more clearly a product of the demographically and economically driven change force in terms of their effect on school culture and structure in innovative and traditional school settings.

2. Prime responsibility for each of the case reports was taken in the following way: Talisman Park (Shawn Moore); Stewart Heights (Sonia James Wilson); Lord Byron (Dean Fink); Blue Mountain (Corrie Giles & Andy Hargreaves); Eastside (Carol Beynon & Ivor Goodson); Durant (Martha Poole); Barrett Magnet (Michael Baker); and Sheldon (Martha Poole & Michael Baker). It is not just the case authors’ data and interpretations but sometimes also their exact words that appear in the cross-case analyses.

3. However, as our evidence shows, many of the reforms were implemented only minimally in conventional high school settings.

REFERENCES


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