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# Teachers' Decision-Making Power and School Conflict

Richard M. Ingersoll  
*University of Georgia*

*What difference does the amount of decision-making power exercised by teachers in schools make for how well schools function? This article reports on a study that used national data to examine the effects of two kinds of decision-making power that teachers wield in regard to core educational issues in high schools—the faculty's collective influence over school policy and the autonomy of individual teachers in the classroom—on the degree of conflict among teachers, students, and administrators. The results indicate that increases in both faculty influence and teachers' autonomy are significantly associated with decreases in school conflict, but that the strength of the relationship depends on the issues that are controlled. In particular, the results draw attention to the importance of teachers' power over activities concerned with the crucial, but often overlooked, sorting and socialization functions in schools.*

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The distribution and effects of power in school systems have been two of the most important issues in both educational research and policy since the 1980s. There has been a great deal of interest in which persons or groups have power in schools, that is, who controls school decisions concerned with key activities and what difference it makes for how well schools function. Indeed, such issues are at the crux of many significant contemporary educational reforms—school-based management, school choice, restructuring, and the professionalization of teachers. However, although both researchers and policymakers in the field of education have increasingly recognized that the distribution of power in school systems is an important issue, the subject has been marked by substantial disagreement and confusion.

One area of disagreement is the degree to which schools ought to be centralized or decentralized. For example, some reformers have contended that too much decentralization in school systems is a primary cause of disorder and inefficiency in the operation of schools and, ultimately, poor performance by staff and students. They believe that the

educational system would greatly benefit from an increase in the centralized control and accountability of school programs and staff. Other reformers, however, have argued the opposite—that too much centralization in school systems is the main cause of disorder and inefficiency in the operation of schools and, in the end, of poor performance by staff and students. In their view, the educational system would greatly benefit if decision making was delegated to the local and school levels.

Furthermore, this debate has suffered from a great deal of confusion because different researchers and policy analysts have, at different times, focused on different groups, on different levels of analysis, and on different aspects of power. For instance, some discussions of decentralization have concentrated on input from parents and local communities into school policy, while others have stressed the empowerment of teachers and school staff. Some analysts have been concerned with an interorganizational level of analysis and on the interface between state or district agencies and school-level staff, while others have been interested in an intraorganiza-

tional level and on the interface between teachers and administrators in schools.

In addition, different researchers have focused on different kinds, forms, and aspects of power. For instance, some have been concerned with the mechanisms and degree of organizational control of teachers and their work, while others have been interested in the degree of professional authority collectively exercised by school faculty, and still others have stressed the effects of the amount of autonomy teachers exercise in their individual classrooms.

Given this variation in emphases, it is not surprising that researchers have come to different conclusions about the distribution and effects of power in schools. Moreover, the resolution of this debate has been hampered by the shortage of empirical studies devoted to specifying and examining which kinds and aspects of power have what effects on which outcomes in schools, and why.

In this article, I seek to clarify this debate by using national data to examine whether decentralization or centralization has a positive or negative impact on how well schools function. The subject of the analysis presented here is the decision-making power held by teachers over core educational activities at the school level, and the objective is to examine the effects of teachers' power on school-level performance. I focus on two distinct kinds of decision-making power held by teachers in regard to the core educational activities in schools—the influence collectively wielded by faculties over school policy making and the individual autonomy exercised by teachers over planning and teaching in their classrooms. The analysis examines the effects of teachers' power on one of the most important aspects of school performance—the degree of conflict among the three key groups in schools—teachers, students, and administrators.

In brief, the results indicate that the amount of power held by teachers does, indeed, make a positive difference in how well schools function, but the effects depend on the types of school activities over which teachers have influence and autonomy. In particular, they point to the importance of the degree of

both the autonomy and influence of teachers over the often overlooked sorting and socialization areas of the educational process. It is for those issues that are most fundamentally social—in which the educational process involves the selection, maintenance, and transmission of behavior and norms—that the amount of power teachers hold is the most consequential for how well schools function.

In this article, I first describe in more detail the two dominant views of teachers' power in schools and what I believe are their limitations. I then introduce the data and methods I used and present the results of my multivariate analysis of the relationship between the amount of power held by teachers and the amount of conflict in high schools. Finally, I offer an explanation of why and how the influence and autonomy of teachers affect the degree of conflict in schools by drawing from organization theory, especially the extensive research on the sources and effects of the distribution of power in workplaces.

## **TWO VIEWS OF TEACHERS' DECISION-MAKING POWER**

The traditional view of most educational researchers has been that elementary and secondary schools in the United States are marked by an inordinate lack of coordination, control, consensus, and accountability and, indeed, are the epitome of "loosely coupled systems" and "organized anarchies" (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972; March and Olsen 1976; Meyer and Scott 1983; Weick 1976). In this view, such "structural looseness" is an inevitable and necessary result of the incompatibility of educating children and formal bureaucratization (Bidwell 1965; Dreeben 1976; Lortie 1969, 1975). As a result, until recently, the conventional and unquestioned wisdom among most educational researchers has been that schools are highly decentralized organizations and that the teaching occupation, although in important ways not a self-regulating profession, is characterized by a great deal of autonomy and discretion in the workplace (Fire-

stone 1985; Tyler 1988; Wilson, Herriott, and Firestone 1991; Wise 1979).

Although the research community has differed over the implications of loose structuring for the performance of schools and teachers, educational policymakers and officials have often assumed that the lack of coordination and control in schools are major sources of organizational disorder, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness (Rowan 1990). Thus, successful reform, they have argued, must focus on greater accountability, higher standards, top-down state controls, national goals, and a "tightening of the ship" (Darling-Hammond and Berry 1988; Kirst 1989; McDonnell 1989; National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983; Wise 1979).

Since the mid-1980s, however, a second and competing view of the distribution of power in schools has been rapidly gaining popularity among educational reformers, policymakers, and researchers. Schools are not too decentralized, this alternative perspective holds; rather, they are not decentralized enough. According to this view, factory-like schools unduly deprofessionalize, disempower, and constrain teachers—a situation that is both dissatisfying to teachers and a source of inefficiency and ineffectiveness for schools (see, for example, Bacharach, Bauer, and Shedd 1988; Conley and Cooper 1991; Corcoran, Walker, and White 1988; Johnson 1990; McNeil 1988; Rosenholtz 1989; Shedd and Bacharach 1991).

Typically, those who hold the second view advocate forms of decentralization, such as school-based management, that are designed to increase the participation of teachers in the operation of schools (Carnegie Forum 1986; Holmes Group 1986). For them, a greater influence on policy making enhances teachers' satisfaction, efficacy, and commitment and, hence, improves the performance of schools.

As a result of these competing views, there is now considerable agreement that the amount of power held by teachers is crucial for schools, but considerable disagreement and confusion over whether the effect of teachers' autonomy and influence is positive or

negative. According to the traditional loose-coupling perspective, schools are overly decentralized and, as a result, marked by disorder and inefficiency; policy-making proponents of this view advocate greater organizational control of teachers and their work. The newer empowerment perspective finds schools to be overly centralized and, as a result, marked by dissension and inefficiency; proponents of this view advocate giving teachers more professional influence over the operation of schools.

Although many have drawn attention to the dissimilarity of these two polar perspectives (see, for instance, Kirst 1989; Rowan 1990), there have been few efforts to explain the simultaneous presence of these views or to test them empirically, especially with nationally representative data. As numerous analysts have pointed out, the debate over power in schools has, in general, suffered from a shortage of theoretical and empirical work devoted to specifying and examining which kinds and aspects of power have what effects on which outcomes in schools, and why (see, for example, Bryk Lee, and Smith 1990; Hannaway 1993; Rowan 1990).

A notable exception is the recent work of Bidwell and Quiroz (Bidwell 1993; Bidwell and Quiroz 1991; Quiroz 1993) on the social organization of teachers' work in high schools. Through extensive fieldwork in schools, these researchers have developed a typology of mechanisms by which the work of teachers is organizationally controlled across different kinds of schools. In their model, organizational control systems in schools vary from top-down, highly bureaucratized, and highly centralized to loosely coupled, highly debureaucratized, and highly decentralized, depending on the size of the schools and the socioeconomic status of the students. Their focus is on the different forms of workplace control in schools: how these forms are embedded in the social organization of school workplaces and how they effect a range of student outcomes.

This article also seeks to clarify the debate over centralization and decentralization in schools and examines the amounts and kinds of power held by

teachers at the school level. An additional emphasis here is on variations in teachers' autonomy and influence across the core educational activities in schools. The objective of my analysis is to use national data to examine how the amount of power held by teachers affects the performance of schools and whether these effects depend both on the kind of power and on the type of activity being controlled. In the next section I describe this focus in more detail.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AND ITS EFFECTS**

### **Power over Core Activities**

Like research on schools, research on organizations in general has long recognized the importance of the centralization and decentralization of organizations and the profound effect of employees' participation in and influence on decision making on the performance of organizations (see, for example, Perrow 1986; Pfeffer 1981). But, as with research on schools, what these effects are has been a source of confusion and disagreement. Among other things, organizational research has shown that the effect of the distribution of power depends, to a great degree, on the types of activities and issues being controlled and the aspects of performance under scrutiny (for a review of earlier research in this area, see Locke and Schweiger 1979). Assessments of the distribution and effects of power in organizations must answer three critical questions: (1) What are the important core productive activities in an organization? (2) Which groups or members wield power in reference to these activities, that is, which participate in, influence, or control decisions related to these activities? and (3) Which kinds and areas of control and influence have what effects on which aspects of organizational performance and why?

Organizational analysts have long stressed that it is especially important first to distinguish which activities and decisions are important and which are not because the power held by particular groups is a function of the extent to

which they influence significant core productive activities and, most important, because control of these issues is the most consequential (see Hinings, Hickson, Pennings, and Schneck 1974; Kanter 1977; Pfeffer 1981; Tannenbaum, Bogdan, Rosner, Vianello, and Wieser 1974). Responsibility for and control over less important issues and decisions is not the exercise of real power; indeed, the delegation of control over nonessential issues is often used as a form of co-optation and a subtle means of centralizing power. In such cases, employees are led to believe they are participants in the management of the organization, when they are not (Selznick 1949).

What are the core productive activities in schools, and who has control over them? Research on the organization of schools from either of the two perspectives just discussed commonly subscribes to the "zone view" of school activities. In this view, school processes and activities are divided into two separate zones. The schoolwide zone consists of administrative activities: school coordination, management, planning, and resource allocation. The classroom zone consists of teaching and educational activities, often referred to as the technical or productive core (Barr and Dreeben 1983; Lortie 1969, 1975).

The two perspectives differ on which is the most important zone and set of activities to emphasize. Researchers who hold the traditional view draw attention to control of the educational zone. Therefore, when they analyze how centralized or decentralized schools are, they commonly ask, How much autonomy do teachers have over educational matters in classrooms? They have found that teachers have high levels of autonomy over many issues of classroom instruction and, hence, have concluded that schools are decentralized (see, for example, Firestone 1985; Meyer and Scott 1983).

Researchers who advocate the newer view do not deny that teachers have substantial influence over some issues of classroom instruction. However, their aim has been to broaden the focus and to draw attention to the importance of the

schoolwide zone. They believe that teachers ought to have input into a school's allocative, planning, and strategic policies. Thus, when they analyze how centralized or decentralized schools are, they commonly ask, How much say do teachers have over schoolwide policy matters outside classrooms? They have found that teachers have little influence and that administrators have much control over policy, resource distribution, and planning and, hence, have concluded that schools are overly centralized (see, for example, Bacharach et al. 1988; Conley and Cooper 1991; Rosenholtz 1989; Shedd and Bacharach 1991).

The different conclusions of the two groups of researchers are, to an important extent, a result of their different emphases. Each draws attention to different types of activities and different levels of analysis. The traditional view emphasizes the lack of bureaucratic control of teachers and their work, whereas the newer view emphasizes the lack of influence teachers have over the way schools are run. But, notably, both agree on the existing division of labor and power in schools: "Schools are marked by a 'traditional influence pattern' in which decisions are differentiated by locale and position . . . administrators make strategic decisions outside of classrooms and teachers make operational decisions inside of classrooms" (Conley 1991:237-38).

Moreover, and the central point related to my analysis, both perspectives accept a narrow view of the educational and productive core of schools. In operationalizing the latter concept, most researchers assume that the core is limited to the classroom, and most emphasize academic instruction. This focus underemphasizes some of the most important educational activities that transpire in classrooms and in schools.

Beginning with the classic social scientific studies of education (Dewey 1902/1974; Durkheim 1925/1961; Sorokin 1927/1963; Waller 1932/1961), continuing through Parsons (1959) and related educational researchers (such as Dreeben 1968; Henry 1965; Jackson 1968), and up to more recent revisionist and

critical analysts of schools (like Apple 1982; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Giroux 1982), investigators have long held that the major purpose of educational organizations lies in their social and institutional functions. Furthermore, some researchers, such as Coleman and Hoffer (1987), have argued that this social role is expanding as schools are being increasingly called on to perform tasks that were once reserved solely for parents, churches, and communities. Indeed, there is a growing consensus that an essential function of schools is the creation and transmission of a shared "ethos" and sense of "community" (see, for example, Bryk et al. 1990; Grant 1988; Kirst 1989). That is, the most important tasks of schools are the production of citizens and the reproduction of the social order. These tasks include two overlapping activities: socialization and sorting. Socialization includes the inculcation of societal norms and behaviors, and sorting involves the differentiation of roles or the reproduction of societal patterns of stratification.

This line of educational theory draws attention to the fact that what students learn in schools is governed as much by social relations in schools as by the content of the curriculum. Much of these social relations are implicit, informal, and unstated, prompting observers to use the term "hidden curriculum" to refer to the norms, behaviors, and roles transmitted to students.

Despite this theoretical context, however, empirical research on education, including studies of organizational control, has generally adopted a far narrower focus on academic instruction in the classroom and, by extension, students' academic performance, as measured on mass-produced standardized tests. Academic instruction and achievement are, of course, integrally related to the socialization and sorting processes in schools. But, by emphasizing the degree of teachers' power over activities commonly associated with formal academic instruction, such as the selection of instructional texts and methods, researchers have usually not directly specified or examined who controls the

behavioral, social, and normative activities in schools.

As a result, these social activities have received secondary empirical status. For instance, researchers commonly underemphasize the importance of disciplining students. In the first place, without the maintenance of some degree of order and discipline, educational processes cannot proceed. However, disciplining students is not simply a prerequisite for the transmission of instruction; it is at the heart of school socialization (cf. Durkheim 1925/1961). In essence, discipline is concerned with which and whose set of values are to dominate school life—one of the most crucial educational activities that transpires in classrooms and schools. Typically, decisions about discipline involve conflict between competing behavioral codes and often involve issues of class, gender, and race (see Apple 1982; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Giroux 1982; Grant 1988).

Likewise, tracking has been deemed to be a key mechanism of stratification and sorting in schools and has been the subject of voluminous research. However, the extent to which teachers control or influence key decisions concerned with the criteria and implementation of tracking has received little attention.

In sum, organization theory suggests that assessments of power in organizations must focus on who controls the core productive activities, which, according to educational theory, are academic instruction, social sorting, and socialization. However, researchers of power in schools have not examined control of the core social functions, such as sorting and socialization, separately. As a result, they may have missed some of the most consequential activities that occur in schools and may have provided an incomplete picture of the distribution and effects of power.

The analysis reported here assesses teachers' power in schools more broadly. It separately examines two kinds of decision-making power that teachers may have—autonomy in classrooms and influence over school policy—in relation to the three core activities in schools—instruction, sorting, and socialization. The objective of this analysis is to

evaluate the effects of the amount of these different types of power that teachers have for the three core activities by examining their impact on one of the most important aspects of school performance—school climate, in particular, the degree of conflict among the three key groups in schools: teachers, students, and administrators.

### **School Conflict and School Performance**

Research on the organization of schools does not usually use school climate, especially, school conflict, as an outcome and an empirical indicator of how well schools function. To be sure, researchers invariably contend that the distribution of power has a crucial impact on the degree of order or disorder and cohesion or disruption in schools. However, they usually assume that a positive climate in schools is a prerequisite to a more fundamental outcome—students' academic achievement. Just as researchers often assume that academic instruction is the primary function of schools, many also believe that students' academic achievement, as measured on mass-produced standardized tests, is the best indicator of school performance and the best means of evaluating the effects of school characteristics on educational performance. But the climate of schools can also be seen as an important indicator of educational performance.

Organization theorists have long argued that organizational climate is especially important for industries and organizations in which interaction among participants is itself the "technology" and "product" of the organizations. In such organizations, the "production process" involves individuals working, not with raw materials or objects, but with other individuals. Because the "technology" often comprises sets of relationships among individuals, such organizations are highly dependent on the mutual cooperation of key groups and levels, such as clients, employees, and managers. In such cases, how well intraorganizational groups, units, and levels work together is a critical aspect of organizational performance and is profoundly

shaped by organizational structure (Kanter 1977; Perrow 1986). According to these analysts, a positive, cohesive, cooperative climate is not simply a correlate of, or a means to, enhanced productivity, but is important in its own right. Moreover, these analysts contend, when interaction is one of the end products, a cohesive, cooperative intraorganizational climate is itself a form of high productivity.

It is reasonable to expect that this argument also holds true for schools. As in other kinds of interactional work, a positive climate, particularly a high degree of cooperation and cohesion among key groups, is important for the performance of schools. Indeed, the character of the relations among students and staff is at the crux of the normative and socialization functions of schools. In this view, a positive, cohesive sense of "community" is not simply a predictor of higher academic scores, but is itself an indicator of success. I adopt this type of performance measure. This analysis evaluates the consequences of the distribution of power by examining the effect of the amount of power held by teachers on the degree of conflict or cooperation among teachers, students, and principals in schools.

## THE ANALYSIS

### Research Questions

My analysis addresses several questions:

1. What effect does the amount of decision-making power exercised by teachers in schools have on the amount of conflict and disorder in schools? Are increases in the power held by teachers over school activities related to increases or decreases in conflict in schools?

2. Do different kinds of decision-making power by teachers (the autonomy exercised by individual teachers over planning and teaching decisions in their classrooms or the collective influence of faculties over school policies) have different effects on school conflict?

3. Does the effect of the amount of teachers' power on school conflict de-

pend on the type of issue or activity (instruction, sorting, or socialization) that is controlled? Is control over some activities more consequential than control over others?

4. Does the effect of teachers' power on school conflict depend on the domain of conflict (between students and staff, among faculty members, or between faculty and principals)?

### Data and Methods

The source of data for this analysis was the nationally representative 1987–88 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). SASS, one of the largest and most comprehensive data sources available on the staffing, occupational, and organizational aspects of schools, was specifically designed to remedy the lack of data on these characteristics of schools. (See Choy, Medrich, Henke, and Bobbitt 1992 for a detailed overview of SASS and Kaufman 1991 for a description of the survey design and estimation of the sample.)

The U.S. Bureau of the Census collected these data for NCES in the 1987–88 school year from a random sample, stratified by state, sector, and school level. The survey consisted of separate questionnaires for the principals of the schools sampled, for administrators of the central school or governing board of each sampled school, and for faculty in each sampled school. In each school, 3–20 teachers (mean = 4) were randomly sampled, depending on the level, size, and sector of the school. The response rates were high: 86 percent for public school teachers; 79 percent for private school teachers; 94 percent for public school administrators, and 79 percent for private school administrators.

Throughout the analysis I used data weighted to compensate for the over- and undersampling of the complex stratified survey design. I weighted each observation by the inverse of its probability of selection to obtain unbiased estimates of the national population of schools and teachers in the year of the survey. I examined junior and senior

high schools because these schools have been the focus of much of the research on power and control in schools. The sample contained 2,975 schools, about 11 percent of which were in the private sector.

The units of analysis in the study were schools, not individuals in schools, and the data represent either school-level responses, as in the case of information collected from administrators, or school-wide means, as in the case of information collected from teachers. Of course, in the latter case, aggregating individual-level data underemphasized within-school diversity and overlooked interrelationships between school-level and individual-level variables, but it allowed me to narrow the focus of the empirical analysis to the topic of interest: the consequences of the amount of school-level power held by teachers.

Using ordinary least-squares multiple regression, I examined the association between several measures of teachers' power and several measures of school conflict while controlling for the background characteristics of the schools, their student populations, and their faculty. These measures were all drawn from the teacher and school questionnaires of SASS. Table 1 presents detailed definitions of all the variables used in the regression analysis and the means (weighted) and standard deviations of these measures.

The SASS teacher questionnaire asked teachers to report the actual influence the faculty as a whole had over various school policies and the control they individually had in their classrooms over several areas of planning and teaching. From these items, I drew five measures, representing both classroom autonomy and schoolwide influence and representing each of the three key areas—instruction, sorting, and socialization.

Table 1 indicates that the degree of decision-making power held by teachers varies widely, depending on the type of power and the activities examined. Notably, teachers were reported to have the highest levels for autonomy over instruction in the classroom—the most common focus of research and policy on school organization—and the lowest levels for

faculty influence over sorting and socialization activities. All five of these measures are positively correlated (for a more detailed discussion of the variations in teachers' autonomy and influence across activities, see Ingersoll 1993, 1994).

SASS also obtained teachers' reports of the degree of cooperation and consensus or of conflict and disorder among students, faculty, and principals in schools. From these questionnaire items, I developed three measures of the character of the relations among the three groups. Conflict between staff and students refers to the degree to which students are alienated from, do not cooperate with, or actively disrupt the manner in which schools are operated. Conflict among faculty characterizes faculties along a continuum from those that function as coordinated teams to those that act as fragmented collections of individuals. Conflict between faculty and principals depicts faculty-principal relationships on a scale from those exhibiting communication, cooperation, and support to those characterized by distrust and friction.

Along with organizational power, there are, of course, numerous other factors that could account for organizational conflict in schools. Previous studies found that important differences in organizational behavior are related to the characteristics of schools, the community in which schools are located, and the type of students who are enrolled. School sector, size, poverty level, and urbanicity, in particular, have been found to be related to variations in school climate (see, for example, Anderson 1982; Bryk et al. 1990; Pallas 1988; Rowan, Raudenbush, and Kang 1991). Furthermore, research on students' attitudes and behavior in schools has long emphasized the importance of the socioeconomic status (SES) of students and the school community in explaining differences in the way students interact with school staff and in the levels of alienation and resistance of students in schools (see, for example, Anderson 1982; Apple 1982; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Giroux 1982; Grant 1988). To control for these characteristics, I included measures of a number of factors



Table 1. Measures Used in the Multiple Regression Analysis

**School Characteristics**

*Private*: a dichotomous variable where 0 = public and 1 = private (mean = .11)

*School size*: number of students enrolled in a school (mean = 703, *SD* = 567)

*Suburban*: a dichotomous variable where 0 = rural-small town or central city and 1 = urban fringe-large town (mean .18)

*Urban*: a dichotomous variable where 0 = rural-small town or urban fringe-large town and 1 = central city (mean = .22)

% *minority enrollment*: percentage of students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, or American Indian (mean = 21, *SD* = 27)

% *poverty enrollment*: percentage of students eligible for the federal reduced or free-lunch program.<sup>a</sup> (mean = 22, *SD* = 24)

% *beginning faculty*: percentage of faculty with fewer than three years of total teaching experience (mean = 11, *SD* = 12)

% *faculty with graduate degree*: percentage of faculty with graduate degrees (master's or doctorate) (mean = 50, *SD* = 29)

**Teachers' Classroom Autonomy**

On a scale of 1 = none to 6 = complete control, the school mean of teachers' control over two areas of planning and teaching:

*Instruction*: mean of four items—selecting textbooks and other instructional materials; selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught; selecting teaching techniques; determining the amount of homework to be assigned (mean = 5.2, *SD* = .51)

*Socialization*: disciplining students (mean = 4.8, *SD* = .67)

**Faculty Policy Influence**

On a scale of 1 = none to 6 = a great deal, the school mean of the faculty's influence over school policies in each of three areas:

*Instruction*: establishing curriculum (mean = 3.9, *SD* = .95)

*Sorting*: setting policy on grouping students in classes by ability (mean = 3.0, *SD* = .94)

*Socialization*: determining disciplinary policy (mean = 3.5, *SD* = .91)

**School Conflict**

On a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 indicates a serious problem, the school mean of teachers' reports for three domains of conflict, each of which is a composite measure derived from a factor analysis of teachers' reports.<sup>b</sup>

*Conflict between staff and students*: mean of seven items—students' physical conflict, robbery, vandalism, possession of weapons, physical abuse of teachers, verbal abuse of teachers, and general misbehavior (mean = 1.88, *SD* = .5)

*Conflict among faculty*: mean of two items—faculty consensus about the central mission of the school and cooperative effort among faculty members (mean = 1.94, *SD* = .39)

*Conflict between faculty and principals*: mean of 10 items on management of the school and the behavior of principals—fairness of evaluations of teachers, principal's expectations communicated, administrative support of teachers, resources available, principal's backing of teachers, frequency of communication about instructional practices, communication about the kind of school wanted, recognition of staff, rules versus professional judgment, and clarity of goals and priorities for school (mean = 1.97, *SD* = .44)

<sup>a</sup> This measure may be an underestimate because not all students who are eligible for the programs identified themselves as such and in the private sector, not all schools participated in the programs.

<sup>b</sup> Factor analysis (with varimax rotation method) was used to develop these indices. Item loadings of .5 were considered necessary for inclusion in a factor. No items loaded on more than one factor. Each factor had high internal consistency ( $\alpha > .7$ ). For a technical report on the construction of school climate composites from the 1987–88 SASS using factor analysis, see NCES (1993).

that were available from SASS: sector, size of the school, urbanicity of the school, and the SES and race-ethnicity of the student populations. I also included controls for some of the background characteristics of each school's teaching staff: the percentage of beginning teachers in a school's faculty and the percentage of faculty with graduate degrees.

**Limitations of the Data**

There were several limitations to the measures of power and conflict used in this analysis. In essence, these measures assessed the characteristics of schools indirectly by aggregating members' perceptions of these structures; thus, teachers were treated as informants of workplace and organizational conditions in

their schools. The use of employee-respondents' perceptions to construct such variables is standard practice in research on school organization and on organizations in general (see, for example, Lee, Dedrick, and Smith 1991; Pallas 1988; Pfeffer 1982; Rowan et al. 1991). Indeed, it is often argued that members and employees of organizations are in the best position to know what these conditions are. Nevertheless, there are several reasons why these measures of power and conflict must be interpreted with some caution.

First, the SASS sample of teachers in each school was random and, hence, representative, but it was not large; the mean size of the sample was four to six teachers per school, depending on the level and sector. It is not clear to what extent a limited within-school teacher sample size affected the representativeness of the measures.

Second, there is the related issue of validity. Because the data represent teachers' perceptions of school conditions, the responses are, by definition, subjective attributions, so it is reasonable to expect that some individuals' reports could have been inaccurate because of attribution bias. For example, highly satisfied individuals could both overestimate their power and underestimate school conflict, or highly disgruntled ones could do the opposite. The data in Table 1 suggest, however, that this may not be a serious problem. Clearly, teachers reported different amounts of decision-making power for different activities. Moreover, as the results to be presented indicate, some areas of reported power had a far greater association with teachers' reports of conflict than did others.

Third, it is also to be expected that different teachers would experience their schools differently and, hence, that their reports would vary, which raises the question of reliability. This analysis did not assume that schools are uniform entities. As in many previous studies of school organization (see Lee et al. 1991; Pallas 1988; Rowan et al. 1991), background analyses of these items in my analysis indicated that differences existed in teachers' reports of organiza-

tional conditions, but these differences were only weakly related to commonly measured characteristics of teachers (gender, race, experience, education, subject taught, and salary). This finding suggests that there was both actual variation in the levels of conflict and power experienced by teachers in schools and some degree of measurement error. But my background analysis also indicated substantial variation among schools for the variables of interest, which suggests that both conflict and power are also collective properties of schools. The relationship between these organizationwide properties is the focus of this investigation.

## RESULTS

The results of the multiple regression analysis are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Because faculty influence on policy making and teachers' autonomy in the classroom are highly interrelated, the effects of each were examined in separate pairs of models. Furthermore, to distinguish the effects of power over instructional and social activities, I progressively added the measures of each type of activity to each of the models. Thus, for each table, the effects of teachers' autonomy are estimated in Models 1 and 2, and the effects of faculty influence are estimated in Models 3 and 4. Models 1 and 3 focused only on power related to instruction, and Models 2 and 4 included power over the social issues.

### Student-Staff Conflict

As the top portions of each of the four models in Table 2 indicate, many of the characteristics of schools and of their students are related to the degree of student conflict in schools. Other things being equal, in private schools and in smaller schools, the teachers reported slightly less conflict with students. However, in schools with more minority students, in schools with more poverty-level students, and in urban schools, they reported slightly more conflict with students.

The question of particular interest here is this: Is the amount of power held by teachers associated with reports of

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis of Conflict between Staff and Students in High Schools

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)
<i>School Characteristics</i>								
Private	-.30	.023*	-.24	.022*	-.28	.023*	-.25	.023*
Size ( $\times 100$ )	.01	.001*	.01	.001*	.01	.001*	.01	.001*
Suburban	.04	.022*	.03	.018*	.06	.018*	.06	.018*
Urban	.09	.022*	.09	.018*	.10	.018*	.11	.018*
% minority enrollment	.003	.0003*	.002	.0003*	.003	.0003*	.003	.0003*
% poverty enrollment	.002	.0004*	.002	.0003*	.003	.0003*	.002	.0003*
% beginning faculty	.001	.001	.002	.001*	.002	.001*	.002	.001*
% faculty with graduate degree	.00002	.0003	.0002	.0002	.0001	.0002	.00001	.0002
<i>Teachers' Classroom Autonomy</i>								
Instruction	-.13	.013*	-.04	.014*				
Socialization			-.19	.010*				
<i>Faculty Policy Influence</i>								
Instruction					-.10	.007*	-.05	.008*
Sorting							-.02	.008*
Socialization							-.08	.008*
Intercept	2.36	.076*	2.76	.075*	2.02	.033*	2.19	.035*
$R^2$	.30		.37		.32		.35	
N	2,939		2,939		2,939		2,939	

\*  $p < .05$ .

students' misbehavior, and is this association independent of the setting of the school? The bottom portions of the four models present the results of the tests of this question.

The results suggest that the decision-making power held by teachers is independently associated with students' mis-

behavior, but the strength of the relationship depends on the activities that are controlled. For example, teachers' instructional autonomy is inversely associated with conflict among students (Model 1). That is, as teachers' control over instructional activities in their classrooms increases, levels of student conflict de-

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis of Conflict among Faculty in High Schools

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)
<i>School Characteristics</i>								
Private	-.19	.028*	-.15	.027*	-.16	.039*	-.12	.027*
Size ( $\times 100$ )	.01	.002*	.007	.002*	.01	.002*	.004	.002*
Suburban	-.03	.022	-.03	.021	-.02	.021	-.01	.021
Urban	-.05	.022*	-.04	.022*	-.05	.022*	-.02	.021
% minority enrollment	.0002	.0004	-.00001	.0003	.0001	.0003	.0002	.0003
% poverty enrollment	.0001	.0004	.0001	.0004	-.0002	.0004	.0001	.0004
% beginning faculty	-.002	.001*	-.002	.0007*	-.002	.0007*	-.002	.001*
% faculty with graduate degree	.0001	.0003	.0002	.0003	.0001	.0003	.0001	.0003
<i>Teachers' Classroom Autonomy</i>								
Instruction	-.07	.016*	.007	.02				
Socialization			-.15	.012*				
<i>Faculty Policy Influence</i>								
Instruction					-.08	.008*	-.011	.009
Sorting							-.05	.009*
Socialization							-.11	.009*
Intercept	2.29	.09*	2.6	.092*	2.27	.04*	2.5	.04*
$R^2$	.06		.10		.09		.16	
N	2,939		2,939		2,939		2,939	

\*  $p < .05$ .

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis of Conflict between Faculty and Principals in High Schools

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)	(b)	(se)
<i>School Characteristics</i>								
Private	-.10	.028*	-.03	.027	-.04	.027	.04	.025
Size ( $\times 100$ )	.004	.002*	.003	.001*	.003	.001*	-.001	.001
Suburban	-.01	.022	-.02	.021	.0004	.021	.02	.019
Urban	-.06	.022*	-.05	.021*	-.06	.021*	-.03	.019
% minority enrollment	-.001	.0004*	-.001	.0003*	-.001	.0003*	-.001	.0003*
% poverty enrollment	-.0002	.0004	-.0002	.0004	-.001	.0004	-.0002	.0004
% beginning faculty	-.001	.001	-.0002	.0007	-.0004	.0007	-.0003	.001
% faculty with graduate degree	-.0004	.0003	-.0002	.0003	-.0003	.0003	-.0002	.0002
<i>Teachers' Classroom Autonomy</i>								
Instruction	-.10	.016*	.02	.016				
Socialization			-.24	.012*				
<i>Faculty Policy Influence</i>								
Instruction					-.14	.008*	-.02	.009*
Sorting							-.07	.01*
Socialization							-.17	.01*
Intercept	2.54	.091*	3.05	.089	2.56	.039*	2.93	.040*
$R^2$	.03		.15		.12		.28	
$N$	2.939		2.939		2.939		2.939	

\*  $p < .05$ .

crease. This association is, however, overshadowed by that of teachers' autonomy over socialization. Once the latter is held constant, the impact of instructional autonomy significantly diminishes (Model 2). Indeed, teachers' autonomy over socialization activities is among the strongest predictors of reduced conflict with students.

A parallel pattern was found with faculty influence over policy. Faculty influence over instructional issues is inversely associated with student conflict (Model 3). But once faculty influence over social activities is held constant, the impact of instructional influence significantly diminishes (Model 4).

### Conflict among Staff

It is reasonable to expect that increases in teachers' autonomy in classrooms and in faculty influence over key issues of students' socialization, such as setting a school's disciplinary policy, would lead to decreases in students' misbehavior. But what impact would teachers' decision-making power over such issues have on the other domains of conflict? That is, would increases in levels of reported faculty influence or teachers' autonomy lead to solidarity,

consensus, and cooperation or competition and division among staff? And, does this degree of collegiality or conflict vary among different schools?

Tables 3 and 4 present the results of the analysis of teachers' relations with their colleagues and with their principals. The results show that levels of conflict and disorder are related to only a few of the measured characteristics of schools (top portions of all models). In private schools, smaller schools, and schools with a greater proportion of beginning teachers, the respondents reported more cooperation with fellow teachers. In schools with more minority students, in urban schools, and in smaller schools they reported better relations with their principals. None of these relationships, however, is strong.

In contrast, the amount of decision-making power held by teachers has a substantial association with cohesion and conflict among the staff. But, again, it depends on the activities examined. Both teachers' autonomy and faculty influence over instructional issues are inversely related to both domains of staff conflict (Models 1 and 3). However, the association of power over the social activities again overshadows that of instruction. In fact, once social activities

are added (as in Models 2 and 4), in most cases, instruction fails to achieve statistical significance. Moreover, the strongest predictors by far of decreases in conflict among teachers and between teachers and principals are teachers' autonomy and faculty influence over students' socialization.

Overall, the results displayed in Tables 2, 3, and 4 must be interpreted with some caution. The relationships between the variables and conflict do not, of course, imply causality but indicate associations. Furthermore, in each case, only a portion of the variance in reported conflict and disorder is accounted for by the predictors that were used. This finding was expected, since the objective was not to provide a comprehensive explanation of conflict in schools. Of the many factors that affect such conflict, only a sample were measured in this analysis.

With regard to the objective of this analysis—to examine the relative importance of teachers' increasing power over different core activities for predicting decreases in school conflict—clear differences were found. In all the models, decreases in the coefficients for autonomy or influence over instructional activities were statistically significant at the .01 level once the social activities were added. Likewise, in all the models, the differences between the coefficients for socialization and for instruction were statistically significant at the .01 level.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### Power and Conflict in Schools

The results of this analysis suggest that the amounts of teachers' autonomy and influence make an important difference for the amount of cooperation or conflict in schools. This association, however, varies significantly, depending on the areas of power that were examined. Notably, although teachers reported greater autonomy and influence over activities concerned with curriculum and instruction, such as the selection of textbooks, topics, materials, and teaching techniques for a course, there is less of an association between control

over these decisions and a positive school climate. It is for those decisions that are fundamentally social—when the educational process involves the selection, maintenance, and transmission of behaviors and norms—that the association between teachers' lack of power and conflict in schools is the strongest. Indeed, autonomy and influence over instructional activities appear to count for little if teachers do not also have power over decisions concerned with socialization and sorting activities.

This pattern holds for both teachers' autonomy in classrooms and faculty school-wide influence over policy and across the three domains of conflict in schools—among students, faculty, and principals. This finding corroborates the value of carefully distinguishing among different productive core activities in schools and calls into question the traditional emphasis on classroom academic instruction as the crucial and primary educational activity of schools and teachers.

What do these results suggest for the two polar views of teachers' power in schools introduced earlier? In the first case, the data indicate that the traditional perspective is partly correct in viewing schools as loosely coupled systems and organized anarchies. Teachers in many schools reported high levels of autonomy over classroom instructional issues—the empirical focus of much of this research. Moreover, teachers in many schools reported extensive problems of cohesion, cooperation, and consensus. But these problems appear to be related not to a lack of control, but to precisely the opposite—a finding that strongly contradicts the traditional view. In the second case, the data show strong support for the newer empowerment perspective. School-level centralization is detrimental: Important internal problems of schools are associated with the lack of influence by faculty.

However, my analysis suggests that neither view of teachers' power goes far enough. The central finding of this analysis is that both views have underemphasized one of the most telling sites of centralized control in schools and a leading predictor of school conflict—the extent to which teachers have power over the social and normative decisions in schools.

### An Organizational Explanation

An organizational explanation for these findings may be found in Kanter's (1977) seminal analysis of the effects of the distribution of power on the relations between subordinates and superordinates in organizations, especially with regard to the problems that women managers encounter. One problem that Kanter found was the pervasive tendency of employees of either sex to report less conflict and problems in their relationships with male superiors than with female superiors. Kanter offered an organizational reinterpretation of this traditional problem—that this tension is due not to any intrinsic characteristics of female managers, as stereotypes of the workplace commonly depict, but to managers' levels of influence and power in their organizations.

Kanter showed that female managers, caught between the often contradictory demands of their superordinates and those of their subordinates, face the same problems as do "men in the middle," described in the classic study by Whyte and Gardner (1945). Managers of either sex who have support and respect from their superiors and have input into the organizational decisions that directly effect them and their units are more committed, have higher aspirations, and report more respect and cooperation and better performances from their subordinates and better relations with their peers than do those with less power over the activities for which they are responsible.

Kanter's argument is that female managers, in general, often have less input with their superiors and less influence in the organization and hence that their relations with subordinates are characterized by greater tension. Kanter noted that the attitudes and behaviors that are stereotypically associated with the bureaucratic personality and with female managers—authoritarianism, rigid rule following, inflexibility, and fear of able subordinates—are akin to intervening variables. They result from a lack of power and contribute further to problems with subordinates, superordinates, and peers. But whether managers exhibit

positive human relations with their subordinates is less crucial than their levels of power over the core productive issues for which they are responsible. That is, subordinates reported better relations with less pleasant but empowered superordinates than with more pleasant but disempowered superordinates.

Kanter's organizational explanation of the conflicts among lower-, middle-, and higher-level members of organizations can be used to illuminate the conflicts among students, teachers, and principals in schools. The parallels between the structural problems endemic to middle managers and to teachers are striking. Teachers are also caught between the contradictory demands and needs of their superordinates—principals—and their subordinates—students—in that they are responsible not only for increasing the motivation and performance of students, but for implementing school policies set by administrators. At the crux of their role and success as "men in the middle" is their level of power: Teachers with power over decisions related to tasks for which they are responsible can exert influence; have a greater sense of commitment and higher aspirations; and, in turn, garner respect from both subordinates and superordinates.

On the other hand, if their authority to carry out school policies is not sufficient to accomplish the tasks for which they are responsible, teachers will meet neither groups' needs. Teachers who have little power are less able to get things done and have less credibility. Students can more easily challenge or ignore them, and principals can more easily neglect to back them. In such cases, teachers may feel pressured to turn to manipulative or authoritarian methods to get the job done, which may simply exacerbate tensions with their students and fellow staff members. Hence, conflict between teachers and their students can be considered a specific instance of a phenomenon that is important in all kinds of organizations: If the influence and responsibility of employees are not commensurate, there will be problems in the workplace.

### Crucial Social Functions in Schools

But why is power over what I have described as social activities so important to teachers and their relations with students, peers, and principals? The following anecdote, drawn from fieldwork associated with this investigation, illustrates the importance of power over disciplinary policies—a key aspect of students' socialization in schools.

As part of a larger study of school organization, I interviewed teachers and principals in four high schools in or near a large city in the East (for a report of the research, see Ingersoll in press). In one of the schools (hereafter called Urban High), the staff described a conflict that arose over a new fad among students: wearing hats in school. Urban High is a large, urban, low-income public high school (Grades 9–12) with a largely minority student body.

This fad did not actually violate a school rule, but it effectively crossed normative boundaries for students' attire at the school. Hence, the school-level administrators decided it was necessary to respond with a new rule that explicitly banned the wearing of hats and then called a faculty meeting to announce the rule and to request the teachers' assistance in enforcing it. At that point, the teachers were asked their opinions on the new rule. The resulting problems of enforcement provide a concrete illustration parallel to the statistical relationships I described earlier between influence over disciplinary policy and the lack of cohesion among organizational members.

From the beginning, this new rule did not have complete support from the faculty. Some teachers strongly favored it, some were willing to go along with it, and some opposed it. As a result, many teachers, especially those who opposed it, did not enforce the rule. Their failure to do so generated conflict among the faculty, between the teachers and students, and between the teachers and the principal.

The administrators, who were now in the position of having to see that all teachers enforced the rule, resented those who did not. In addition, teachers who did enforce the rule resented those who did not share the burden, and rightfully so, since they were well aware of the results of inconsistent enforcement. On the other hand, teachers who thought that the rule was unnecessary resented being pressured

to enforce it. Having had no say in the creation of the rule, many teachers felt unsure whether they had sufficient authority or backing to enforce it. And whether the teachers supported or opposed the rule, they all resented the negative consequences of uneven enforcement for their credibility and for their continuing relations with their students—both of which were crucial to their ability to teach. Finally, the students, sensing the staff's lack of commitment, consensus, and power, felt they were better able to resist or ignore the rule. The resulting dissension was unquestionably counterproductive for life at Urban High.

Rules for students' behavior, such as the wearing of hats, are not trivial or atypical. At issue is what a school's social norms are to be and who is to make such decisions. This is a key issue of organizational control. The point here is that teachers' power, or the lack of it, over the content of these rules is consequential. Neither this anecdote nor the statistical models indicate that increasing teachers' power over such decisions will eliminate these domains of conflict. But both suggest that it would reduce conflict.

Distinguishing among different areas of power has important implications for policy. The results of this analysis suggest that efforts to reform schools ought to decentralize power over social policies. But they do not suggest that decentralizing the determination of social issues will be easy. School restructuring, site-based management, and decentralization usually focus on expanding teachers' input into either instructional activities, such as curricular innovation, or administrative activities, such as hiring and budgetary allocations (David 1989). However, such reforms rarely focus on a similar expansion of teachers' power over the crucial social policies of schools, such as the determination of who may attend the school and who may not, how the students will be tracked, and what behavior will be allowed and not allowed. As the results of this analysis suggest, autonomy and influence over instructional activities will count for little if teachers do not also have power over fundamental socialization and sorting activities.

It may be precisely because basic issues of school socialization and sorting are important societal functions and are of great concern to parents, students, school administrators, and larger constituencies that they are so centrally controlled. The unfortunate irony is that such concern and control result in such negative consequences for school performance.

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**Richard M. Ingersoll, Ph.D.**, is Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Georgia, Athens. His main fields of interest are sociology of education and organizational sociology, including the organizational structure of schools and the occupational characteristics of teaching. He has conducted research on organizational control in schools, the status of teaching as a profession, the organizational determinants of the turnover of teachers, and the supply and demand of teachers.

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