

Triage or Tapestry? Teacher Unions' Work Toward Improving Teacher Quality in an Era of Systemic Reform

A Research Report

by

Nina Bascia

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

June 2003

(Document R-03-1)



Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON



Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy

A National Research Consortium

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (lead institution)

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

TEACHERS COLLEGE/COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Other active participants in CTP's research and dissemination program include researchers affiliated with Indiana University, Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of North Carolina, and Education Matters, Inc.

CTP studies the way policies and conditions in schools, districts, states, and teacher education institutions shape the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. The Center pays particular attention to the ways these policies and conditions interact with each other to influence the teaching profession and its practice.

The Center's program of research is carried out in collaboration with various other research organizations, among them other OERI-funded research centers, including the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE), and the Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA). The Center is affiliated with a variety of professional and advocacy organizations that represent teachers, teacher educators, state and local policymakers, disciplinary groups, and educational reform interests.

The work reported herein was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R308B970003, as administered by the National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking and Management, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of either national institute, OERI, or the U.S. Department of Education, or the endorsement of the federal government.

Thanks to Julia Koppich and Ann Lieberman for their helpful reading and their suggestions for improving a draft of this report.

CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Introduction	3
The Data Base: Teacher Unions, Past and Present	4
Six Case Studies	6
New York State United Teachers	6
Washington Education Association	7
North Carolina Association of Educators	9
United Federation of Teachers	10
Birchwood Education Association	11
Pine River Classroom Teachers' Organization	12
New Directions for Teacher Unions	13
Conceptualizing Systemic Reform: Triage or Tapestry?	13
Holding Teacher Unions to a Standard	15
New Ways of Working for Teacher Unions	16
Investing in Partnerships and Relationships	17
Contributing to the Educational Infrastructure	18
Compensating for Increased Centralized Control	20
Teacher Union Contributions to the Tapestry of Reform	21
Supporting the Development of Teaching Standards and Licensure	22
Initiating Strategies for Enhancing Attraction and Retention to Teaching	23
Initiating and Supporting Initial Teacher Education and Ongoing Professional Development	25
Challenging Student Assessment Frameworks	26
Factors that Matter in Teacher Reform Efforts	26
Internal capacity	28
External capacity	29
Conclusion	30
References	32

ABSTRACT

This report looks at and identifies emerging trends in the roles that teacher unions play in educational reform and improving the quality of teaching. A description of the efforts of six teacher unions to improve teacher quality within the context of the current systemic reform movement shows a range and depth of union initiatives beyond what is commonly known in policy research. The report highlights organizational strengths of teacher unions, the unique contributions they make to teacher quality, and some of the challenges they face. Two broad conceptions of systemic reform in support of improving teaching quality—triage and tapestry—are presented and contrasted. When educational improvement is understood as a “tapestry” of efforts that requires multiple initiatives in many arenas by many reform players, unions appear to perform several important and unique functions toward improving teacher quality.

INTRODUCTION

While the focus on improving teaching and learning affords an opportunity for the state to exercise proactive leadership, realistically speaking, there are limits to what can be accomplished through the vehicle of state policy action. Establishing and sustaining quality teaching is equally dependent on the capacity of organizations and networks at regional, district and school levels to productively engage in improvement efforts that are realized in the classroom (Shields & Knapp, 1997).

Our conception of the teaching environment as embedded contexts departs from a more common view that school contexts are . . . hierarchical in structure and additive in their effects on educational processes. We assume interactive and transactive relationships among school settings and contexts in their effects on teachers' work (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, 143-145).

Teacher unions have been part of the educational landscape for over a quarter century. In all but 16 states, teachers have collective bargaining rights at the local (district) level; in a sizeable number of school districts, teachers have voted to require all teachers to pay monthly union dues, based on the understanding that everyone benefits from organizational advocacy. Teachers' organizations exist and operate at state and district levels even where collective bargaining has not been legalized. At the state level, unions are powerful lobbyists for educational issues, drafting legislation, assembling research and evidence, and attempting to influence the direction of educational policy. Nationally, the two major teachers' unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), work independently and with other organizations to support a variety of reform initiatives. At all of these levels of the educational system, and across the country, unions initiate, support, and attempt to influence the shape of educational practice through a wide variety of projects, ranging from assisting individual teachers and school staffs to attempting to redefine the standards that guide the teaching profession (Bascia, 1998a, 2000).

It has been difficult to develop an accurate picture of the roles teacher unions play in relation to educational improvement especially with respect to current policy directions (i.e., large-scale reforms that emphasize standards for teaching and learning and have accompanying assessment and accountability mechanisms). Most educational policy research has viewed unions as not quite legitimate decision makers, at best benign or irrelevant but frequently obstructive, rarely visionary, and tending to promote mediocrity (Carlson, 1992; Larson, 1977; McDonnell & Pascal, 1988; Lieberman, 1999; Mitchell & Kerchner, 1983). This critical view is often reflected in policy research: for example, in their influential work on systemic reform, Marshall Smith and Jennifer O'Day wrote, "If the union emphasis in contract negotiations is only on increases in salaries and benefits . . . it will be very difficult for [a] district to . . . develop a creative and productive instructional environment" (1990, p. 256). Such comments tend to be speculative rather than grounded in solid evidence, since there is not much empirical research on unions' roles relative to educational quality, and much of the reform research has ignored unions or attempted to make do with scant evidence. Policy documents that have noted unions' productive reform efforts (e.g., National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996) are buoyed by a handful of individual cases of innovation rather than by evidence of widespread practice.

Research that has focused specifically on teacher union activities and priorities presents a picture of these organizations as potentially productive contributors to policy and practice whose efforts are constrained by a range of factors. With respect to constraints, researchers have noted, in particular, that unions are limited by the

bureaucratic tendencies of the educational system itself (Johnson, 1983, 1984), by the legal parameters of collective bargaining (Carlson, 1992; Larson, 1977), and by the difficulty of fairly representing a membership with diverse priorities and occupational needs (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1981; Bascia, 1994, 1998, 2000; McDonnell & Pascal, 1988). Even when unions attempt to overcome these limitations, they encounter difficulties in maintaining effective, proactive positions within policy systems where they have little formal authority and where policy directions change with some frequency (Bascia, 1994; Bascia, Stiegelbauer, Watson, Jacka & Fullan, 1997; Johnson, 1987; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner & Mitchell, 1988).

This report describes some emerging trends in the roles teacher unions play in educational reform, especially with respect to improving the quality of teaching. It highlights organizational strengths that teacher unions possess, their unique contributions to teacher quality, and challenges they face. It does so by presenting and contrasting two broad conceptions of systemic reform in support of improving teacher quality, one of which is characterized as “triage” and the other as “tapestry.” That is, in relation to a model of reform that focuses scarce resources on a small number of targeted, centrally directed innovations, unions often appear irrelevant or counterproductive (triage). When, however, educational improvement is understood as requiring multiple efforts in many aspects of educational practice by many reform players, unions appear to perform several important and unique functions within the larger educational policy system (tapestry).

The report describes the efforts of six teacher unions to address and improve teacher quality, revealing both a greater range and depth of union initiatives than is commonly known in policy research. It describes how union organizations work strategically within the policy system to overcome challenges that would otherwise seriously constrain their involvement in reform. It demonstrates how union initiatives in support of improving teacher quality both map onto and exceed current common reform directions. It identifies features—both within unions themselves and in the prevailing ideas that drive policy and practice—that make a difference in terms of organizational effectiveness and the breadth of their efforts. It suggests that unions play several unique and important roles with respect to educational improvement in general and to teacher quality in particular and that union involvement in reform be taken more seriously by policy researchers and policymakers.

The Data Base: Teacher Unions, Past and Present

The report draws from over a decade of research on American teacher unions’ roles in educational reform (Bascia, 1994, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Bascia, *et al.*, 1997; Lieberman & Bascia, 1991), but it focuses most specifically on attempts between 1998 and 2001 by six organizations—three at the state and three at the district level—to improve teacher quality within the context of the current systemic reform movement. These organizations correspond to the state and district sites selected for study by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP) in its multi-year, multi-level study of how policies affect quality of teaching in K-12 education, a national research center project funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Situating this study within the larger CTP research initiative permitted the consideration of teacher union activities and priorities in relation to broader state and local policy, economic, and social contexts. That is, through interviews with state, district, and school-level administrators and educators as well as union personnel (school representatives and office staff as well as elected union leaders), access to the larger CTP interview and survey sets, and discussions with other researchers working in these settings, it was possible and indeed necessary to develop an understanding of unions as embedded in, interacting with, responding to, and actively attempting

to influence policy and practice. This approach contrasts with the bulk of past union studies that focused specifically on relationships between union leaders and decision makers and on evidence derived from contracts and news stories.

This report extends the work of earlier union reform research in several important ways. First, rather than taking a “snapshot” of union activities in relation to particular reform initiatives at a particular time, as most union reform research has done, it provides a more longitudinal assessment of unions’ efforts by comparing contemporary activities with those reported across several decades. A consideration of the evolution of reform ideas in recent years provides the conceptual underpinning for the report and helps explain both the logic and relative value of what unions currently do. Second, the report’s focus is broader than most past union research: it considers the work of both state- and district-level organizations (McDonnell & Pascal’s 1988 study is an exception to the aforementioned trend) and the work and working relationships of union staff as well as elected union officials. Third, rather than focusing exclusively on organizations that might be characterized as innovative, the union sites in this study reflect a broader range in terms of their reputations for reform; the degree to which they have initiated, supported, and/or resisted reform; their size, organizational complexity, and resource bases; their ability to convincingly articulate comprehensive reform strategies; and the depth, range, and coherence of their reform efforts. Keep in mind, these organizations were neither randomly selected nor chosen according to specific criteria, but they do represent some useful contrasts for analysis. Accessed through the larger CTP sample (which selected states on the basis of state reform activity and districts within those states on the basis of their diverse student populations), the six organizations include both AFT and NEA affiliates and two that operate outside of a legal collective bargaining framework. Each, however, has demonstrated an increased commitment to improving the quality of teaching in recent years (several are leaders in this regard), and each has been constrained in its reform efforts by common features of current reform directions.

There are three district and three state level organizations. Each is paired—a district within a state—and it is possible, to some extent, to discern the extent of mutual influence between district- and state-level organizational activities to see how state policy context contributes to district-level priorities. The selection of specific state level organizations for this study was made on the basis of the affiliate of the particular union which represents teachers in the district selected by the CTP study.

Three of the organizations (Washington Education Association and Birchwood Education Association [a pseudonym], which constitute a state-district pair, and United Federation of Teachers in New York City) were studied in greater depth, including several site visits over a three-year period; interviews with approximately a dozen officials, staff, involved teachers and outsiders who interacted with the organization; and more substantive document collection and analysis. These three cases reveal within-organization activities, the wider range of projects union staff are involved in, and relationships between local working conditions and educators’ capacity to utilize these organizations to influence and improve practice (see also Bascia, 1994, 2000, in press, and forthcoming).

The six organizations provide useful contrasts in terms of the policy contexts within which they work, their size and structure, the specific issues on which they are focused, the relationships they cultivate, the particular challenges they face, and the extent to which they are able to initiate and/or actively participate in shaping the conditions that affect teaching quality. At the same time, given the small number of cases and the site selection strategy, it is not possible to claim that this is a representative sample or that the findings are generalizable across the U.S. Rather, the report acknowledges and compares trends across cases that suggest new ways of assessing

what unions do or could do vis-a-vis teacher quality reform and the conditions that support or inhibit those efforts.

It is important to state a second caveat for reading these case summaries and the analyses that follow: the organizational perspectives and initiatives may be completely new to readers and may stand in direct contrast to conventional wisdom in general and to what readers have heard about union involvement in these jurisdictions in particular. Such contrasts between what is visible from inside unions and invisible or different from the outside are symptomatic of challenges that unions face as they work in the larger policy system.

Table 1 (see page 7) provides basic descriptive information about the six teacher organizations included in this study. Organizations marked with an asterisk are those studied in greater depth. Shading reflects pairing of state and district organizations.

SIX CASE STUDIES

New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)

The New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, is the largest union in the world. In the New York State legislative arena, it is but one of many lobbying organizations: some local teachers' organizations (New York City, for example) also employ their own lobbyists. Over 90% of the state's teachers are members of NYSUT locals because, with the exception of Buffalo, all of the state's large cities are AFT rather than NEA affiliates.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, much of NYSUT's work involved influencing state legislators' decisions by providing information and drafting legislation to be considered by elected state officials. Like many other states, New York includes vastly different local conditions: high-poverty large urban districts, suburbs, and rural areas; poverty and relative wealth; and areas of recent immigration settlement and ethnic, racial and linguistic diversity as well as more socially homogeneous populations. These differences were a challenge for NYSUT, not only in terms of serving its own constituents across the state but in terms of its ability to maintain credibility in such a contentious political arena. Given a conservative state administration and a fast-paced, comprehensive standards-based reform agenda, trying to keep concerns on the table about challenging teaching and learning conditions, especially in high-poverty cities was a further challenge. NYSUT attempted to navigate this by arguing that educational standards could only be implemented successfully if resources from the state were forthcoming.

NYSUT's legislative department drafted, introduced, and lobbied on an array of issues directly affecting members including pensions and health care as well as on broader educational issues including curriculum standards and state aid. Like most state-level teacher organizations, NYSUT provided a range of membership services and engaged in a host of activities beyond its lobbying efforts. A field services unit, the conduit between district-level union organizations and NYSUT, provided support around organizing, collective bargaining, contract enforcement, and union leadership development. A legal services department represented locals and teachers and provides representation in employment-related matters at the state level. A research unit surveyed members and provided information for locals in support of collective bargaining, and on the status and impact on current educational issues; it also provided information on how local teachers could make use of professional development resources, including Teacher Centers (a NYSUT-championed, state-funded, school-

based professional development initiative), and a range of professional development offerings, including graduate coursework. NYSUT's communications program was the organization's media liaison, publishing brochures and newsletters for members and supporting locals' development of communications strategies.

NYSUT's priorities reflected a combination of their own initiatives (such as Teacher Centers) and attempts to temper and shape legislation introduced by others (such as charter school legislation).

Table 1. Teacher Union Study Sites

NAME	AFFILIATION	CONTEXT	QUALITIES
New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)	AFT	Geographically/socially diverse; policy emphasis on curriculum standards and student achievement	Large, somewhat complex
United Federation of Teachers (UFT)*	AFT/NYSUT	New York City: large, socially diverse, politically contentious	Strong contract; many efforts to improve teaching in academically challenging schools
Washington Education Association (WEA)*	NEA	Policy emphasis on assessing student achievement; teacher salary and working conditions set at state level	Complex organization interwoven into educational policy establishment
Birchwood Education Association (BEA)* (pseudonym)	NEA/WEA	Fiscally strapped suburban district	Dominated by small group of male veteran teachers; influential in WEA
North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE)	NEA	Non-bargaining state; some working conditions set at state level. Emphasis on National Board recommendations; close political partnership between Governor and NCAE executive director	Organization personified by executive director
Pine River Classroom Teachers' Organization (PRCTO) (pseudonym)	NEA/NCAE	Fairly traditional urban district; teachers have low profile	No bargaining; diplomacy and education law are employed as organization advocates to improve working conditions

* These organizations were studied in greater depth. Shading reflects pairing of state and district organizations.

Washington Education Association (WEA)

The Washington Education Association is a large, well-staffed organization with a sizeable resource base. Because nearly every local teachers' association in Washington is a NEA local, and Washington has a legislated "agency fee" (all teachers are required to have union dues drawn from their monthly paychecks to support local and state level union organizations), the WEA is able to count on funds collected from nearly every teacher in the state. At the time of the study, increased state policy activity, along with local districts' inability to raise funds through property taxation given the state's property tax limits, meant that state educational politics and policies dominated local decision-making; that collective bargaining was limited in its scope; and that the state-level teachers' organization was central to teachers' ability to influence educational policy directions.

As an affiliate organization of the National Education Association, the WEA adhered to the governance structure set by the NEA constitution, but in many ways

the organization operated independently of the NEA. The WEA set its own priorities and chose which NEA programs and projects to incorporate and, similarly, offered WEA services and resources to local organizations but refrained from setting state-wide organizational priorities for them. In the late 1990s, the WEA attempted to bridge the two worlds of policymaking and teaching, to be actively involved in influencing policy and to inform its policy influence with concerns and wisdom from the field, and to provide services and information of value to educators.

WEA staff enjoyed many working relationships and joint projects with other state agencies. WEA staff sat on the various educational policy-setting commissions and worked with the state office for public instruction (OSPI) on teacher certification issues, on the state advisory committee for professional teaching standards, and on National Board certification issues at the state level. In some senses, then, the WEA was an insider, part of the educational fabric of the state. This insider role manifested, too, in its relationship with practitioners: The WEA offered a range of professional development options to teachers and other educators directly. The WEA attempted to balance immediate and local concerns with longer term, more comprehensive priorities such as developing legislation for a complex infrastructure to support teachers' professional learning, including supporting and staffing regional professional educational advisory boards, working with locals to develop local programs, and providing training and support for new teachers.

In some ways, the units within WEA's organizational structure paralleled those of NYSUT, but perhaps because of the opportunity for in-depth research, many of WEA's departments appeared to have moved further beyond and extended their traditional roles, and many worked with other units on joint initiatives. One overarching goal was providing information that local educators could act upon. A research department with six staff provided information for local teachers' associations and districts. The WEA also distributed monthly updates on state policy activity that educators would otherwise have a hard time accessing. The organizational unit responsible for contract maintenance and labor negotiations continued to provide support for local collective bargaining, but its goals and activities increased and transformed markedly. Grievance processing, for many years the unit's major task, had been reduced by nearly one half. Perhaps because so little of substance was subject to negotiations at the district level, WEA's primary strategies with respect to local labor relations were to support cooperative rather than adversarial bargaining by providing training in interest-based bargaining, to provide information on what was open to negotiation. When they were brought in to help resolve a local conflict between teachers and administrators, instead of focusing on winning concessions, WEA labor specialists were likely to consider the substance of a disagreement and to offer the educators, school and district staff technical assistance in order to help resolve the practical problems the conflict pinpointed. The WEA also developed an initiative to help local schools and districts develop effective working relationships with parents and other community members.

While many of these staff-driven innovations seemed powered by a desire to build local capacity for the future, much of the WEA's direction was set by members' immediate concerns, and, at the turn of the century, at least some teacher members were agitating for a redirection of WEA priorities. In Washington, state policy emphasized compliance-based reforms, and with reduced educational funding, class size had increased to the third highest in the country and teacher compensation was low. Teachers expressed a perception of "too much complexity, too many demands" from the state, and some called for the WEA to focus on a single issue, raising teachers' salaries. For the president and some other vocally powerful union officials (including the presidents of large local affiliates), the compensation issue was symbolically important—it reflected an attempt to redress a "lack of respect for the

teaching profession.” There was an emerging dissonance within the organization. On the outside, what was visible to the public was an organization fixated on teacher compensation.

The WEA had several apparent advantages as a teachers’ organization: its size and capacity, the inventiveness of its staff, and the professional careers of its staff (many came from and still had positive working relationships with other state agencies—indeed, the state superintendent of public instruction was a former WEA president) which interwove it with other organizations in the larger educational infrastructure. Yet because the teacher members in its local organizations felt inadequately supported by the state policy infrastructure, the WEA experienced a disequilibrium as it attempted to balance the need for advocacy with the need to inform and influence.

North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE)

Like many southern states, North Carolina has “right to work” legislation, which means that its teachers and other workers do not have collective bargaining rights. Like other such states, however, it has active state-level teachers’ organizations—especially the North Carolina Association of Educators—that attempt to influence educational policy directions.

In North Carolina, like Washington, educational funding and some working conditions are legislated by the state rather than locally. State education law provides the ground rules for teaching, including working conditions provisions, that would otherwise get worked out at the local level through contract negotiation. Because at the time of this study the NCAE was the only political action committee that supported public education in the state, it enjoyed a very strong position in terms of legislative influence.

The NCAE focused its efforts on ensuring adequate funding and equitable support for teaching across the entire state and especially for historically poor rural schools. It provided less direct technical assistance to teachers and schools than state organizations like the NYSUT and WEA. It did, however, support a summer Teacher Academy, where school teams of teachers received training on current pedagogical and organizational strategies, and a Center for Teaching and Learning, which provided training for teachers for National Board certification.

Particularly striking during the period of the study was the personification of NCAE in its executive director, a former special education teacher, his close relationship with the governor because of the time the two men spent on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (the governor was the founding chair of the Board), and the joining of forces between the governor’s office and NCAE to establish National Board certification within the state. At the time of CTP’s core study, North Carolina boasted the most Board-certified teachers of any state, with the NCAE urging the linking of teacher salary to standards. Much of the NCAE’s efforts could be characterized as working with the governor in support of many of the features identified by the National Board and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. In the Excellent Schools Act, an omnibus piece of legislation strongly endorsed by NCAE, were provisions for more rigorous licensure requirements, enhanced induction, performance-based requirements for continuing licensure, National Board Certification, and a career ladder based on pay increases linked to tenure and Board Certification.

Tempering this exclusive and unusual relationship between the governor and executive director—the extent to which the agenda favoring teacher quality, the primacy of both governor’s office and NCAE in state policy activity—was the frank acknowledgment that such efforts and the positive relationship between the two

entities would not likely outlast the governor's tenure and the executive director's departure for NEA national office staff leadership.

United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

The United Federation of Teachers is the teachers' union for New York City and arguably the largest, most powerful and most influential teacher union in the country. In the early 1960s, it was one of the first local organizations to secure the legal right to organize and bargain for teachers, negotiating the most comprehensive contract in the country at that time. It was also one of the first unions to recognize the potential of using traditional bargaining processes to improve the quality of education more broadly; a contract negotiated in the late 1980s, known internally as the "reform contract," contained many provisions that referred directly and explicitly to educational reform. There have been only three presidents in the nearly 40 years of the UFT's existence, each deeply charismatic, each tightly connected to and influential in national AFT politics (and in the AFT's educational reform efforts at the national level), and each able to articulate a coherent, increasingly broad vision of educational improvement. As a result, to a greater degree than many other unions, the UFT drove rather than merely responded to others' reform initiatives. At the local level, the UFT had been part of the historical fabric of educational practice and educational reform in New York City for many years.

During the time of CTP's core study, much of the articulated justification for the UFT's actions was a concern about the challenging realities of teaching in a large, socially and economically diverse urban school system across New York City's five boroughs. Many of the union's special projects and staff provided resources, professional development, and advocacy to schools and teachers of student populations who were not academically successful. The UFT's efforts at the bargaining table and in the state legislature were focused on ensuring adequate training and compensation for teachers in ways that supported schools for inner-city children. The UFT articulated a view of improving teacher compensation as a practical necessity in attracting highly qualified teachers.

The UFT had a strong reputation, locally and further afield, for vigilant contract maintenance. Beyond this, it managed a wide range of projects and priorities that attempted to enhance the resource capacity of New York City's educational system and to improve teacher quality. Many UFT staff had responsibility for projects aimed toward marginalized students, schools and programs, including special education students and schools on state probationary review ("Schools Under Review" or SUR schools). A peer assistance program helped tenured teachers improve their teaching skills; a large professional development unit provided an extensive array of courses for credit, workshops, and a "Teacher Center" initiative trained teacher-facilitators and placed them in low-performing schools to develop comprehensive curriculum and pedagogical improvement projects. (Teacher Centers appeared to be a highly attractive form of support for schools: during the course of the study, a number of New York City's community school districts requested that Teacher Centers be placed in all of their elementary schools.) Several initiatives supported parents improving their ability to work with their children on schoolwork. A number of union staff, called "special representatives," worked on a range of emergent issues and initiatives, including a "resource curriculum" that identified content and provided sample lesson plans and teaching materials to fill in gaps left unspecified by staff and city curriculum standards.

All union staff extended their work out into the field: they reported spending about half of every week in schools, sharing information, providing training and support, and offering relevant resources. Staff also worked with administrators and

coordinators in community school district offices and with the board of education for the entire system, developing a range of initiatives to improve teachers' capacity to address the academic needs of the city's children. In many cases such offers were welcome, but in some instances administrators challenged the credibility and right of union staff to intervene in the interpretation of educational policy.

One of the most challenging aspects of UFT staff's work was the organization's interactions with the complex web of educational decision makers in New York City: the frequent succession and short tenures of chancellors over many years meant that a significant dimension of UFT's efforts was in "explaining all of this to [a new chancellor], why he should have to talk to the union and [why, for example,] the union might have something to say about teacher recruitment and professional development." The union also had to interact with city government, especially the mayor, since the city provided some direct educational funding and essentially dominated economic discussions at the bargaining table. New York City educational politics were highly visible and volatile. Many UFT staff characterized the union as a whole, and their own work in particular, as providing stability to, and capacity for, the greater educational system while policy makers, administrators and policy fads came and went. The UFT's size, resource base and history of innovation drove it forward, but its ability to maintain its momentum was affected by challenges in the larger policy environment.

Birchwood Education Association (BEA)

The Birchwood Education Association (a pseudonym) in Washington State supported teachers across several small cities in an area of economic decline. The district had been unable for many years to pass a bond levy to repair or replace deteriorating, unsafe buildings. Birchwood's teaching population was aging, the student population increasingly comprised new immigrants, and it was difficult to compete with districts with larger funding bases and greater public support for education when trying to attract a quality pool of new teachers.

Because of the relative size of the teaching force it served, the Birchwood Education Association had a larger resource base than most other WEA affiliates, and it was one of a handful of locals across the state whose president enjoyed "full-time release" from teaching. This meant the BEA could be a presence both in the district and in terms of influencing the WEA. Birchwood teachers had been active in state and national affiliate organizations for many years, and the BEA's projects had a higher state profile than those of smaller districts—indeed, one locally developed reform initiative had caught the attention of WEA and become a model for statewide policy development.

Constitutional provisions that flowed from NEA through WEA ensured a strongly interactive representative structure, with union representatives in every school, member surveys, monthly newsletters, and frequent meetings. Ninety-eight percent of the district's teachers voluntarily paid union dues, but as in many districts, only a small number of teachers were interested in school and district level union leadership roles (see Bascia, 1994, 1997); and as in many districts, these teachers tended to come primarily from a group of veterans who had been union-active for much of their teaching careers. The not-too-distant retirement of this cohort of union leaders presented a challenge to the organization's viability: how would a new generation of teachers without the personal experience of fighting for union representation during their own professional careers understand the potential of the teachers' association in relation to educational improvement?

Birchwood teachers' concerns, and therefore much of the substance of local contract negotiations, centered on issues of basic working conditions: the details of class size, the number of different classes ("preps") assigned to any one teacher, how

special education students were distributed across classes, the nature of “voluntary” extra-classroom assignments such as lunchroom duty, control over money for teaching materials, and benefits. Bargaining over such issues had been the core of teachers’ association activity for many years, partly due to the district’s chronically tight budgetary situation and partly because of the district’s tendency to hire administrators from outside of the district rather promoting from its own teaching force, thus exacerbating differences in perspective between teachers and administrators. It was therefore perhaps not surprising that contract provisions focused almost exclusively on working conditions; an induction program for new teachers was the only anomaly. According to union leaders, formerly adversarial labor relations had been “more positive” in recent years; in fact, however, since the establishment of collaborative labor relations, easier issues had been resolved more quickly and the issues remaining on the table were those that were more challenging. These local conditions, and the BEA’s strong presence within the WEA, were part of the movement that drove the state association to refocus so much of its public attention on teacher compensation. The BEA’s frustration was rooted in its inability to ensure enduring and satisfactory working conditions for teaching.

Pine River Classroom Teachers’ Organization (PRCTO)

The Pine River Classroom Teachers’ Organization (a pseudonym) was located and served teachers and other educational workers in a North Carolina city and in the surrounding area. Like other local teachers’ organizations in states where collective bargaining is not legislated, the PRCTO’s role was somewhat muted: the ability of the organization to represent teachers was dependent, on the one hand, on staff’s ability to invoke state educational law and, on the other hand, on the diplomatic skills of organizational leaders to smooth conflicts between teachers and administrators. In this organization, presidents served one-year terms (and could serve two in succession), which could limit their ability to establish effective working relationships with decision makers. In this district, further, even while parents could provide input to the board through advisory councils, there historically were no conduits for teachers’ participation in decision making. During the time of the study, the PRCTO’s president was invited for the first time to sit “in a trial capacity” on the superintendent’s cabinet’s weekly meetings—meetings that appeared to be less about decision-making than an opportunity for the superintendent to speak his mind. In this context, approximately half of all teachers had chosen to be PRCTO members (with small numbers of teachers belonging to two other voluntary statewide teachers’ organizations).

The issues teachers brought to the PRCTO drove the organization’s efforts. Typical concerns involved working conditions (for example, compensation for expected activities, adequate time for expected work). The PRCTO could and did apply for state (NCAE) and national (NEA) teachers’ association funds; where other local organizations, like Birchwood, often use such funds to support local innovations, the PRCTO used them to provide membership benefits to compensate for the absence of local collective bargaining. The PRCTO, like many teachers’ organizations, was particularly concerned about the provision of adequate professional development for new teachers and attempts to broker various forms of inservice training. Also typical was the PRCTO’s willingness to support teachers who wished to launch their own initiatives: in this case, a community outreach project in the form of a school-based program for homeless children. When such initiatives receive the endorsement of the PRCTO’s executive board, teacher volunteers were recruited to carry them out.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHER UNIONS

The six case organizations represent some important differences. They vary in size and complexity and, more significantly, in the extent to which they appear to be focusing their efforts on initiatives that would be recognized as reforms or, conversely, as mired in traditional teacher union concerns. Yet despite this diversity they share two features that suggest that teacher unions as an organizational population may be different from the ways they have been depicted in past studies. The first is that all of the organizations valued the development and maintenance of positive, collaborative working relationships with educational decision makers. The second is that all were engaged—wherever their projects and priorities might locate them on a traditional-reformist continuum—in efforts to improve the quality of teaching. These two features, taken together, suggest a portrait of teacher unions as organizations more or less actively committed to educational improvement.

The rest of the report examines these new or previously unacknowledged directions in greater analytic detail. It reveals some of the challenges teacher unions face as they attempt to improve teacher quality in the current educational policy climate, how they attempt to overcome these challenges, their actual contributions to policy and practices that support improved teacher quality, and the internal and external factors that influence their effectiveness.

Conceptualizing Systemic Reform: Triage or Tapestry?

It is helpful sometimes to step away from the conventional wisdom of the day in order to see how certain assumptions about schools, teaching, students, and the process of change shape educational policy and practice. Prevailing ideas put into words and thereby legitimize certain goals and behaviors, creating certain possibilities and limiting the likelihood of others. It is easy to forget that what is conventional wisdom now may have been different in the past and may well be different in the future (Bascia, 2001; Werner, 1991) and that what is taken for granted here might look somewhat strange across national, state, or local boundaries (Broadfoot & Osborn, 1993; Louis, 1990). Raising questions about current policy goals may help us refocus our efforts so that they are more effective over the long term.

While the notion of “systemic reform” currently drives policymaking not only across the U.S. but also internationally (Earl, Bascia, Hargreaves, Watson & Jacka, 1998; Whitty, Powers & Halpin, 1998), it is neither a timeless nor a static concept. The concept of systemic reform emerged in this country from some policy analysts’ dissatisfaction with piecemeal, incremental reform efforts of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s. “[F]ragmented authority and multiple short-term and often conflicting goals and policies” (Smith and O’Day, 1990, p. 238; see also Timar, 1989) had failed to significantly improve educational practice. Marshall Smith and Jennifer O’Day’s (1990) description of systemic reform focused on identifying the state educational policy levers that would be most effective in ensuring “successful school workplaces for teachers and students” (p. 236).

Smith and O’Day argued convincingly that states were the most critical policy actors in turning around poor teacher quality and unsuccessful schools because states had in recent years taken on responsibility for educational funding and equitable distribution of resources. States were “in a unique position to provide coherent leadership, resources, and support to the reform efforts in our schools” (p. 246). The equitable distribution of resources and “alignment among key elements of the system” (Knapp, 1997, p. 230) were seen to require centralized control; and states have Constitutional authority over education. Specifically, many (though not all) of the domains identified by policy analysts as crucial to improving teaching quality—

teaching standards, licensure requirements, and curriculum and student assessment mechanisms—are more readily addressed by centralized efforts. This can become tautological: Knapp (1997), for example, describing efforts to improve the teaching of science and math, noted that systemic reform efforts tend to focus on assumptions about which “aspects of teaching . . . are most reachable by policy action” (p. 232). Thus, systemic reform emphasizes the role of state policy in improving practice—it implies that centrally-driven, large-scale policy is the best, most effective way to ensure teacher quality.

What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996), another highly influential document that identified the way for current reform efforts, provided a “blueprint” for producing “excellent teachers in all of America’s schools” (p. vi). Where Smith and O’Day argued explicitly for states to increase their role in ensuring equitable resource distribution and standards, *What Matters Most* focused on naming specific policy domains—domains for establishing professional standards for teaching, improving teacher education and ongoing professional development, teacher recruitment and retention, establishing a career continuum in teaching, and reorganizing schools in ways that focus resources more directly on teaching activities. *What Matters Most* cautioned that these strategies are mutually reinforcing and must be undertaken simultaneously: “The first step is to recognize that these ideas must be pursued together—as an entire tapestry that is tightly interwoven. Pulling on a single thread will create a tangle rather than tangible process” (p. vii).

The “tapestry” metaphor invoked in *What Matters Most* asserts more than the contention that multiple aspects of educational improvement should be addressed at once. It builds upon notions, which emerged during the so-called second wave of reform in the late 1980s, that a range of institutional players had both the right and the responsibility to contribute to educational reform (Bascia, 1996; Ogawa, 1994), that experimentation was useful and that building capacity—of individual educators, school organizations and staffs, and school systems—was a necessary prerequisite to bringing about and sustaining educational improvement. In the context of educational policy directions of the later 1980s, classroom teaching was viewed as operating in relation to a mutually reinforcing constellation of other teaching activities (e.g., professional learning, curriculum development, shared decision-making, engagement with students in extracurricular activities); schools were seen as one arena within a set of professional relationships for teachers (e.g. professional networks and associations, schools of education, community development projects—see, for example, Bascia, 1997; Cochran Smith & Lytle, 1992; Lichtenstein, McLaughlin & Knudson, 1992); one social service within a network of social agencies for students (e.g., health care, and so on—see Adler & Gardner, 1994) and shaped according to local conditions and local understandings of good practice.

For more than a decade now, systemic reform increasingly has emphasized the primacy of standards and accountability measures; mandates rather than capacity building have been the policy instruments of choice (see McDonnell & Elmore, 1991); and the role of the state and the authority of formal administrative positions rather than networks of support. “Alignment of key elements of the system” and “those aspects of teaching [which] are most reachable by policy action” (Knapp, 1997, p. 232) have become the primary focus of systemic reform to improve teacher quality. Early advocates for systemic reform argued for the development of locally appropriate responses to state policy, for a harnessing of local, experimental, diverse reform strategies, “the energy and professional involvement of the second wave reforms [combined] with a new and challenging state structure to generalize the reforms to all schools” (Smith & O’Day, 1990, p. 234). But reduced public spending for education and the loss over the past several years of both teaching and system competence as a

generation of seasoned educators has retired have contributed to the streamlining of the policy system we have come to equate with systemic reform. The convergence of tighter educational budgets and the centralizing tendencies of systemic reform have resulted in a “triage” approach: fewer resources, less diversity and experimentation, an emphasis on traditional roles and activities for educators (teachers teach, administrators evaluate), reporting systems that emphasize accountability rather than bi-directional or lateral informing, a policy system that emphasizes standardization rather than allowing for contextual diversity, and an infrastructure that is lean on support for teaching as daily practice. This “triage” model of systemic reform sums up pertinent features of the current policy context that are significant in terms of how teacher unions must operate. Like any model, it creates both possibilities and constraints.

Holding Teacher Unions to a Standard

Teacher unions have both contributed to and demonstrated the recurring tensions between two fundamentally divergent tendencies that shape the American educational system and which are captured in the triage and tapestry metaphor: its centralizing, hierarchical nature, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, its capacity to respond to and include an expanded range of participants through democratic governance structures. Educational historians have described how about a century ago the establishment of large urban educational systems created a new bureaucratic order organized hierarchically and governed by administrative “experts” who claimed the authority to tell teachers, for the first time, what and how to teach (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Tyack & Hansot 1982). One enduring result of the educational systems’ architectural plan has been that this power structure has been hard-wired in, so to speak: the dominant status of administrators has been maintained, while the involvement of teachers in educational policy making has been much more tenuous (Carlson, 1992). At the same time, the new bureaucratic structures have frequently been contested by teachers and others; teacher unions first emerged in response to the establishment of school system apparati of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Gitlin, 1996; Larson, 1977; Urban, 1982).

Within the educational establishment, the most common standard to which teacher unions have been held since their inception is the degree to which their priorities are congruent with prevailing policy directions and administrative preferences. Teachers’ organizations first became the focus of policy research in the later 1960s and early 1970s, as state after state passed legislation enabling collective bargaining and decision makers had to contend with a newly organized and stronger union presence. The literature emerging during this period first raised concerns about the potential challenges unions might pose to district- and school-level administrative discretion (Englert, 1979; Johnson, 1983, 1984; Kerchner & Mitchell, 1986; Russo, 1979; Simpkins, McCutcheon & Alec, 1979; Williams, 1979).

Both the news media and policy researchers have criticized teacher unions by assuming that compliance should be the standard by which these organizations’ actions are judged. Though not a common topic of research, teacher unions—when they do attract the attention of policy analysts—are often viewed as focused on irrelevant issues, such as increasing teacher salary even in tight fiscal contexts and with promoting bureaucratic solutions rather than promoting quality teaching and learning. Unions are portrayed as lacking legitimate authority and as out of touch with what really matters—a portrayal that in turn makes it difficult for union staff and officials to establish credibility and work proactively within the educational policy system. A recent review of teacher union research in *Education Week* concluded that “[r]egardless of where they stand, one thing unites the few researchers who actually study unions and the many commentators who have an opinion on them: Everyone wants them to change” (Bradley, 1996).

In their comprehensive assessment of teacher union activity with respect to educational reform in the 1980s, McDonnell and Pascal suggested that unions could take three possible stances toward reform: they could oppose or *resist* “proposals [policies] that challenged their traditional interests, adapt to this new set of circumstances and *accommodate* various reform options espoused by others, or play an active role in *shaping* new approaches to teacher policy” (1988, p. 16, emphasis added). A body of evidence emerging over the past decade and a half suggests that the tapestry metaphor might provide a more balanced way of assessing teacher unions’ efforts with respect to educational reform than the triage. That is, in a model of reform that requires the leadership and involvement of multiple players within the larger educational system, teacher unions might be assessed according to their unique advantages and constraints relative to other organizations and the extent to which they contribute to educational systems’ capacity to support quality teaching and learning. *What Matters Most* noted, first, that while teacher unions contribute to some of the counterproductive aspects of educational practice, they are not solely responsible for them; and second, that unions had also been responsible for many gains in teacher quality:

[Traditional bargaining agreements] have sometimes established or continued conditions that are inimical to change. As contracts have evolved within school bureaucracies and have mirrored the systems in which they are embedded, many have come to include rules that are restrictive during a time of reform. The same is true of many federal, state and local regulations, whose roots in old systems and procedures can be frustrating when changes are sought. . . . Although it doesn’t make nightly news, teacher groups have often been at the forefront of the movement to improve schools and enact greater quality assurances in teaching (1996, p. 56).

The next section of this report focuses on the range of priorities, activities and relationships undertaken by the three state and the three district-level organizations. It describes some of the ways teacher unions act and react in the context of some of the dominant characteristics of the current reform climate.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING FOR TEACHER UNIONS

To a great extent, teacher unions’ effectiveness is shaped by formal educational policy system parameters. State legal frameworks determine whether collective bargaining is permitted and by what terms it will be carried out. In schools, at the district level, and with respect to the policy-making processes of the state, the substantive involvement of union members (teachers), staff, and elected officials in decision making is conditional, subject to the willingness of administrators and elected officials to involve them or consider their input. States have and execute their authority to require compliance of educators through policy mandates and to define the purview and authority of teacher unions. While state labor law can be modified and the productivity of working relationships between union staff and decision makers certainly vary, the basic terms of union involvement restrict them from participating as equal or even consistently effective partners in educational decision making (Bascia, 1998b; Carlson, 1992; Larson, 1987). As the UFT and BEA cases suggest (see also Bascia *et al.*, 1997), frequent changes in school and district administrators and legislative term limits tend to divert at least some of unions’ organizational energy away from sustained attention to reform as personnel attempt to establish their credibility with new decision makers (whose views of unions often follow commonplace assumptions about their illegitimacy and irrelevance).

As earlier sections have suggested, the assertion of formal authority by state and administrative structures is not a new phenomenon, but it was strikingly evident

during the period covered by the CTP study. With states asserting their right to set teaching and learning standards, to hold educators accountable and to control educational spending, there would seem to be little space for the less formal influence of teacher unions at state or district levels. Coupled with reduced interest in program innovation, where unions have been particularly active with respect to new forms of support for teaching, there would seem to be fewer available opportunities for teacher leadership.

Such changes ultimately may be borne out as trends: a stronger administrative structure with reduced purview for either local decision making or state-level innovation could result in less proactive reform activity on the part of teacher unions. The BEA and struggles within the WEA suggest this trend; some union organizations respond by becoming narrower, more reactive and/or authoritarian in their approaches (Bascia, forthcoming). Yet other organizations work to deliberately compensate for the formalization of the educational system: some of the teacher unions in this study rejected simplistic, reactive and idealistic positions with respect to reform in favor of more nuanced and generous responses (see also Bascia, in press). While McDonnell and Pascal's (1988) typology of union actions as resistant, accommodating or initiating with respect to reform is very helpful, none of the organizations studied could be characterized exclusively as just one of these: many appeared to incorporate elements of all three positions as they attempted to challenge, mitigate against, influence, enrich and/or change the larger educational policy system. They did this by not only challenging but also working around and compensating for some of the prevailing features of the current reform movement: by investing in partnerships and relationships and thereby reducing their own marginalization vis-a-vis the formal administrative structure; by providing intellectual and resource capacity to the educational system to challenge the prevailing "triage" approach to reform; and by attempting to balance increased centralization and the primacy of the formal authority structure by working across levels and locales.

Investing in Partnerships and Relationships

The quality of working relationships between elected union officials and school and school system administrators has been a frequent focus of the literature on teacher unions (e.g., Johnson, 1983, 1984; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner & Mitchell, 1986, 1988). For union leaders in all six CTP cases, to a greater or lesser extent, working on and through such relationships was a given. A strong example is the blanket commitment to interest-based bargaining across the state of Washington, but every case reveals a basic interest in productive working relationships among leaders. As the case descriptions reveal, however, connections at the leadership level have been augmented by developing working relationships between union staff and other individuals and groups with interests in educational reform.

Teacher unions increasingly work strategically with others in the educational system to not only initiate but also to sustain coherent and comprehensive reform. At the local level, the establishment of (or at least the attempt to establish) substantive labor-management appears to be becoming the norm. In Washington state, for example, the WEA supports its local affiliates with training in collaborative rather than adversarial bargaining, and when local officials request assistance resolving a school- or district-level conflict, UniServe staff focus their efforts on identifying the substantive root of the problem rather than laying blame. In New York City, UFT staff work with school, community school district and Board of Education staff to tailor professional learning programs and targeted intervention initiatives (for instance, in schools having difficulty complying with federal and state special education regulations, and for schools on state probationary review which must make serious efforts to improve their educational programs or face the prospect of being shut down).

Also in New York City, the UFT has intensified its efforts to work with parents, both at the organizational level through joint lobbying and collaborative initiatives and by providing a range of ways for parents to become more knowledgeable and more actively involved in their children's education.

Some teacher unions reach out to schools' communities by helping support the formation of school-community partnerships (an example of the WEA's responsiveness to member demand). The UFT has a dedicated staff person developing sustained relationships with school parents—through a battery of learning opportunities so parents can support their children through greater understanding and involvement in their homework; through involvement with teachers and other educators through school-based Teacher Centers; and by attempting to develop a strategic alliance between the UFT and organized parent groups such as the PTA. An idea promoted by the NEA's national office and picked up by a number of state and local affiliates (including the WEA and BEA) involves communications units in focused public awareness campaigns in support of public education.

Maintaining productive working relationships with others at the state level is also increasingly important to teacher unions. In North Carolina, Governor Hunt's tenure on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards afforded him an appreciation of the commitment and value of teacher unions, which led to the development of a strong relationship with the NCAE that would not have been possible given the otherwise fractured nature of the legislative landscape. In Washington state, WEA staff sit on various educational policy-setting commissions and draft legislation in conjunction with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; for several years, WEA lobbyists have met weekly with their counterparts in other major state educational agencies to share information and develop complementary strategies. In these ways, teachers' organizations become more a part of the fabric of the policy-setting system.

Contributing to the Educational Infrastructure

As organizational players in their respective educational contexts, some teacher unions actually provide system capacity by providing fiscal and human resources that otherwise would not be available.

An increasingly common example of this trend lies in the area of professional development for teachers and others (see also Bascia, 1998a, 2000). As the case descriptions in earlier pages describe, where states and districts have had their funding reduced and been unable to provide adequate workshops, courses, induction support, school-based professional learning strategies to help teachers improve their classroom performance—to address new curriculum and teaching standards and to improve the academic success of low-performing students—unions have tried to make up the difference. And where states and districts have focused their professional development resources exclusively on improving teachers' classroom performance, unions have expanded their array of professional development offerings to help teachers, principals, parents and other educational partners understand and interact more effectively in the broader educational milieu—in school, district and community settings—that they understand as providing crucial support for classroom teaching.

A second domain of union activities which may be relied upon by other players in the larger educational system lies in the area of public relations. Even the BEA, which is rather marginal with respect to school district decision making, is called upon by senior district administrators when the district is criticized by school board trustees or news editorials; NEA affiliates possess valuable resources and skills when it comes to defending and promoting public education. (This idea has also migrated to

Canada, where several provincial teachers' federations fund ambitious public relations campaigns in support of public education.)

At the state level, the WEA is the strongest example within the CTP study of union contribution to educational infrastructure. Its staff, many of whom had worked for other state educational agencies in the past and could call upon longstanding relationships and working knowledge, had several strategies for continuing their work within the state policymaking infrastructure: for example, its lobbyist meets weekly with lobbyists from other state agencies; it sponsors collaborative projects, such as legislation with other agencies such as the Office for State Public Instruction, and then provides training and support for new teacher assistance, peer assistance and review programs; it conducts research for other state and district organizations; and it has staffed and provided funding for a statewide network of regional professional education advisory boards that will develop and deliver locally appropriate professional development for educators. The WEA conducts research not only for its members, and not only with respect to collective bargaining; it actually has established a database to track variations across districts and over time on local factors that otherwise would not be kept, since the state does not do so. The WEA also ensures the human resources necessary for the development of regional professional learning agencies—plans which involve not only WEA staff and members but staff from the state department of education.

Beyond their capacity for immediate response and support for daily practice, some teacher unions appear to serve as test-beds for certain kinds of innovations that might take years of planning and strategic work to come to fruition (see also Bascia, 1998a). Particular professional development strategies, especially support for beginning teachers (through induction, mentor teacher and peer review programs), are obvious examples of initiatives for which the implementation originated in union organizations, at the instigation of members, officials or staff, and have come to be seen as necessary supports for teaching. Many other, less obvious and less visible examples exist: curriculum initiatives (beyond the confines of the CTP study, there are many instances of teacher unions sponsoring the development of materials and activities in support of social equity and diversity) and peer mediation and other anti-violence initiatives represent district-specific efforts to improve classroom and school practices (Bascia, 1998a, 2000, in press). At the state legislative level, working ideas into and through the legislative process may take many years. Such long-term efforts are only visible by looking within union organizations and examining the work educators have done, sometimes over many years, to keep particular goals or programs alive even and especially when there is little interest or support elsewhere in the formal educational system.

A final way that teacher unions provide infrastructural support is by creating opportunities for educators to develop skills and relationships and learn the workings of the larger educational system. Because unions work and enable work in so many locations and levels, and because at least to some extent educators can work through union organizations on initiatives of their own design, these informal learning opportunities (see Bascia, 2000) extend possibilities for leadership development beyond what is available within the formal administrative hierarchy. This learning and growing sense of possibility for the work of individual teachers as well as groups of educators can enrich the educational system.

In all of these ways, teacher unions participate in shaping educational policy and practice by both helping define the content of reform and providing educators and other involved groups with skills training and information to help them increase their competence within the larger educational system.

Compensating for Increased Centralized Control

As formal educational authority has become more concentrated at the state level over the past decade, with states asserting legislative control over educational practice through funding formulas, curriculum standards, accountability mechanisms, and licensure requirements, it would seem reasonable to expect that teacher union activity would also concentrate at the state level, particularly in terms of attempts to influence the content of legislation.

The study suggests that state level influence and access is increasingly crucial to teacher unions, and that local teachers' organizations that can afford it will tend to hire their own lobbyists rather than working exclusively through the state teachers' organization. But rather than only mirroring the recent centralizing tendencies of the formal system, at least some teacher organizations have continued developing, refining and expanding their range of relationships and strategies in ways that contrast with and in some ways compensate for these trends in the larger policy environment. In the six cases were several interesting organizational arrangements, both internal to unions and with respect to their relationships with outsiders.

Unions have enhanced their roles as conduits between their own members and formal educational system and, simultaneously, as vehicles for teachers, administrators, parents and others to expand their skills, information, and ability for understanding and acting effectively in the current educational system. These efforts can be seen in the expansion of their communications units and publications efforts, the growing array of their research initiatives, and in their attempts to reach out to and work with other organizations and staff on an ever-increasing range of offerings.

Some teacher unions also try to compensate for the hierarchical, centralized nature of authority in the educational system through the working patterns and portfolio assignments of staff. In traditional union organizations, staff associated with professional development, collective bargaining, and other organizational priorities tend to interact with distinctly different groups and constituents (government officials, administrators, "teacher leaders," teachers in trouble) and, thus, tend to maintain distinctly different views of the world from each other. Similar to the result that differences among teachers in secondary schools or other complex organizations has, differences in the world views of staff in different units of teacher unions can result in a rich program of organizational "products," but they can also result in inadequately informed decision making and costly internal turf wars (see Bascia, 2000). Some union organizations, such as the UFT and WEA, deliberately attempt to compensate for these balkanizing tendencies: staff who interact with legislators and state and district agencies may also spend part of their time in the field, working with teachers in classrooms and other work settings. They may travel around their states or districts to learn what is occurring in multiple educational contexts, to ensure that they are visible and that their programs work and are appealing in a wide variety of settings (see also Bascia, in press). Perhaps even more significantly, staff may take care to distribute information about problems and innovations from the field across the organization through a range of deliberate organizational processes, including complex portfolios for individual staff members, cross-unit job-sharing, frequent and routine debriefing sessions, and efforts to build equitable and mutually informing relationships between short-term elected officials (who come from the field) and long-term dedicated staff.

Another strategy favored by some teachers' organizations is to provide a variety of non-compulsory offerings from which local organizations (district-level unions, schools) and individual teachers can choose and fashion to suit their local contexts and needs. Even while state policies have become more standardized and compulsory in their intent, some teacher unions seem to have taken to heart the lessons

of program evaluation research: just as with reforms promoted through the formal educational system, no single union reform initiative is attractive, meaningful, and effective across a group of teachers of any diversity (Bascia, 2001, 1994; Bascia *et al.*, 1997). This represents a change from unions' tendency, a decade or so ago, like many state and district agencies, to identify a single reform and place unrealistic hopes in its potential for educational improvement (see Bascia, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000; Bascia *et al.*, 1997). The strategy of providing a "menu" of diverse and flexible options (see Hargreaves, 1994) may be the result of union staffs' awareness of the growing bimodal distribution of teachers (veterans and brand new teachers) as well as of differences in student populations and teaching conditions across urban, suburban and rural areas. A typical example of this menu approach is a wide range of professional development options for teachers (including not only topic but also timing, location, pedagogical structure, and unit to be addressed—individual teacher vs. whole school staff).

These deliberate strategies by some of the teacher unions in the CTP study—and in other union organizations studied in recent years—challenge and contrast with the hierarchical, standardizing, triage model of reform and support delivery in effect across the country. Interviews with union officials and staff suggest that they represent conscious attempts to compensate for the reduction of system capacity in recent years.

TEACHER UNION CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TAPESTRY OF REFORM

While prevailing opinion views teacher unions as uncommitted to educational improvement, a closer reading of the research on these organizations suggests a somewhat different picture—one of organizations concerned about educational quality as it is manifested in and through teachers' work. This concern may be evident even when the directions unions choose appear to contradict prevailing policy preferences. While there has been much of a speculative nature written about the negative impact of union presence on educational practice, most actual empirical research has revealed a more nuanced picture, with union officials attempting to establish productive working relationships with district and school administrators and to compensate for the limitations of the educational bureaucracy (Kerchner & Mitchell, 1986; Johnson, 1983, 1984, 1987). Starting in the second half of the 1980s, Charles Kerchner and colleagues Douglas Mitchell and then Julia Koppich first articulated and then supported unions in adopting, a stance of "joint stewardship" for educational reform (Kerchner & Mitchell, 1988; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993) by trading adversarial for cooperative practices and working with district decision makers to support local school reform (Bascia, 1994; also Lieberman & Bascia, 1991; Rosow & Zager, 1990). Empirical studies that followed described both changes in local governance to involve union leaders and members in substantive decision making and various reforms in support of increased teacher quality, such as school- and district-level support, innovation in initial teacher education, teacher recruitment and retention, and a wide range of professional development strategies (Bascia, 1988a; Bascia *et al.*, 1997; Johnson, 1988; Murray & Grant, 1998; Martin Macke, 1998).

In the late 1980s, Kerchner and Mitchell argued that teacher unions were entering a new phase of their evolution, moving beyond organizing, contract maintenance, and adversarial relationships to cooperation and reform-mindedness. This assertion appears to have been somewhat overly confident as evaluation research (e.g., Bascia, *et al.*, 1997; Lieberman & Bascia, 1991) has also revealed the fragility of these new arrangements and the enduring, intractable nature of some major union concerns. But the developments described in the CTP study provide some evidence to support Kerchner and Mitchell's claims that union organizations are evolving (or are at least different from the ways most of the literature has portrayed them). The study suggests

that organized teachers generally are concerned about the quality and durability of public education; that at least in some cases they are less likely to want to trade off their own good for those of students and more likely to view quality teaching and learning as mutually supportive. Within these organizations are individuals who have read the research critical of teacher unions and are concerned about their organizations' capacities to respond effectively to a changing reform climate. As an organizational type, teacher unions are becoming more interested in and able to initiate and support innovation.

Though it is not well documented (but see McClure, 1991; Ogawa, 1994; Rauth, 1990), there have been a range of recent efforts to "scale up" union reform, that is, to expand the quality and quantity of unions' support for educational improvement. Staff members in the offices of both national teachers' organizations have been supporting reform since at least the mid-1980s. Various networks of union organizations (sometimes supported by foundation funding) have sprung up to support what is sometimes called "the new unionism." Diverse examples abound (see also Bascia, 1998a). The network of California locals (both AFT and NEA affiliates) which developed "trust agreements" to support reform initiatives, between 1989 and 1991 (Bascia, 1994; Lieberman & Bascia, 1991); the Learning Laboratories initiative, a nation-wide network of local unions supporting reform, sponsored by the National Education Association (Bascia *et al.*, 1997), in the later part of the 1990s; the American Federation of Teachers' attempts, since the mid-1980s, to showcase innovation and foster educational improvement, including the annual QuEST conferences; the National Coalition of Educational Activists, a grass-roots organization of educators concerned about unions' ability to promote "social justice unionism" (Peterson & Charney, 1999); both the NEA and the AFT's commitment to the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN), a group of progressive union leaders focused on restructuring unions to promote reforms that lead to improved student learning; and both organizations' involvement in the Learning First Alliance, a coalition of national-level educators' groups (national member organizations of teachers, parents, teachers, curriculum specialists, school principals, administrators, school boards, state boards of education, chief state school officers, and schools of education) committed to improving student learning.

The CTP cases demonstrate that, to some degree, as state- and local-level organizations, the scope of teacher unions' work has expanded over the past decade or so in several ways that are generally not known. Provided next are examples of the range of efforts undertaken by the six case unions both in relation to policy areas currently valued by policy analysts and in areas of practice that currently are receiving less policy attention.

Supporting the Development of Teaching Standards and Licensure

Following on the work of NEA and AFT national leadership in supporting the development of national professional standards for teaching, many state affiliates have taken up the implementation of this work at the state level. The North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), for example, whose executive director was a member of the National Board during the development of its standards, worked to develop legislation to support teachers' Board certification, including providing training and drafting legislation that would link salaries to board certification. The New York State United Teachers has supported the development of standards in that state. Washington Education Association staff are members of various state working groups and advisory boards that work on various aspects of teacher licensure.

Beyond contributing to the development of standards and the state legal framework that supports them, unions increasingly are involved in training and filling

in the gaps so that higher quality teaching is a reality in the classroom. Developing curriculum is one strategy; the UFT, for example, has undertaken a “resource curriculum” which identifies content areas, provides sample lesson plans and teaching materials to flesh out the city and state’s new curriculum standards.

Initiating Strategies for Enhancing Attraction and Retention to Teaching

It is both ironic and troubling that teacher unions’ traditional concern about compensation and working conditions are perceived by many union researchers and the media as “self-interested,” “mundane,” and “nonprofessional” concerns when these factors are so clearly fundamental to attracting and retaining individuals to teaching careers. Compensation and working conditions constitute the legal purview of teacher unions and are also those policy domains vis-à-vis teacher quality exclusively championed by teacher unions. They are also persistent points of contention in local labor relations and, where salary and working conditions are set at the state level, in legislative agendas.

While Smith and O’Day and *What Matters Most* nodded at least obliquely to the importance of *working conditions* for teaching quality, a focus on resource support and attention to organizational arrangements and professional roles and relationships have been lacking in many state and local policy directions for several years. Teachers’ working conditions may have become less salient to decision makers because, as Knapp suggested (1997), they can not be as directly influenced by state policy as other factors (class size and professional development regulations are increasingly likely to be set at the state level). Further, their influence on the quality of teaching and learning is not as direct and simple as other factors; they tend to cost real money which has been in scarce supply; and they are not susceptible to mandating which, as suggested earlier, is the most commonly used policy instrument of the day. Working conditions—especially resources, relationships, roles, an appropriate degree of professional autonomy, and opportunities to develop teaching skills—both directly influence teaching quality and contribute to educators’ sense of achievement and job satisfaction, serving to attract and retain teachers to the occupation in general as well as to particular schools and districts (Johnson, 1990; McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). But working conditions are simultaneously difficult to legislate, especially from afar and yet are particularly sensitive in the aggregate to policy and administrative influence. The teacher unions in the CTP study could and did attempt to improve teachers’ working conditions, but while the tools at their disposal—individual contract items and legislative drafts—might, for example, allow teachers some discretion on purchasing teaching materials, or reduce the likelihood that they would be assigned to teach courses for which they were not prepared, they could not by themselves counteract prevailing conceptions of teaching, embedded in state policy and in district and school administrative practices, as technical rather than intellectual or professional work (see Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

The quality of teachers’ working conditions has also been peculiarly susceptible to erosion. Even while, on average, union contracts increase in size from year to year, the unpredictability of educational funding and the volatility of educational policy bring about changes in the type and degree of teachers’ authority, their competence, and their professional relationships (Bascia, 1994). This very issue broke the camel’s back in Birchwood, prompting the BEA and other WEA affiliates to demand that the state teachers’ organization redirect its reform energies toward increasing teacher compensation.

Teachers are vocal when concerned about what they experience as inadequate or inappropriate working conditions (Bailey, 2000). Further, as the BEA and WEA cases illustrate, teachers’ concerns about the wisdom or feasibility of policy initiatives can

get funneled through the narrow channel of demands for increased compensation and improved working conditions because these domains are permissible topics for negotiation (Bascia, 1994; see also Carlson, 1992; *What Matters Most*, 1996).

All three district-level unions in the CTP study spent significant amounts of organizational time and effort attempting to ensure an adequate level of quality of conditions for teaching. In the North Carolina district where the Pine River Classroom Teachers' Organization was located, even though teachers had no legal right to union representation, union officials' interventions on teachers' behalf paralleled, albeit less forcefully, those we saw in settings where the union had a strong reputation for contractual enforcement, such as New York City. In New York, a number of specified union officials and staff—vice presidents for elementary, middle and secondary, vocational/technical schools and for Schools Under Review (under state probation), for paraprofessionals and for special education—as well as community district representatives, spent at least half of every week visiting schools. Union staffs' interventions appeared to reflect more than mere concern that contractual agreements be upheld and administrative authority be scrutinized: their interviews repeatedly referred to attempts to negotiate resolutions to tensions and disagreements between teachers and principals, getting to the root of conflicts by attempting to determine what organizational conditions might be challenging effective teaching and learning, and helping solve practical problems by providing information, training and other resources. Variations in school size and structure across New York City (including a number of small schools-within-schools, thematically focused schools and larger, more traditionally-organized schools) allowed us to see variations in teachers' access to organizational decision making, their relationships with other teachers and school administrators, and correspondingly the extent to which they felt union intervention was necessary (see also Bascia, 1990, 1994). And the six organizations varied with respect to their ability to effectively articulate the mutually reinforcing nature of traditional union concerns and school reform.

Teacher salary is one of the very few issues which can be directly bargained over, it serves as a symbolic flash-point both for teachers (in terms of their beliefs that the school system and public value their work—see Bascia, 1994) and for the media and the public (in terms of evidence that teachers are “selfish”). Concerns about the ability to attract qualified teachers are the basis for teacher unions' arguments for raising teacher salaries to levels competitive with other occupations, and in the case of some states and districts, with teacher salaries in other locales. In Washington, where teacher salary, set at the state level, was very low compared with the national median teacher salary, forces within the WEA drove the organization to adopt a strong position with respect to improving teacher salary; a media campaign succeeded in convincing the Washington legislature to commit to higher teacher salaries. The WEA also developed legislation that was passed and that provided special funds that local districts could use to recruit new teachers (in Birchwood, teachers voted to direct the BEA to negotiate that this money be distributed across the entire teaching pool to make up for chronically low salaries). In New York City, which has an extremely large number of non-certified teachers and is surrounded by suburban districts with significantly higher teacher salaries, teacher compensation became a hotly contentious issue in labor relations, with the union rejecting the mayor's argument that teachers' salaries should be tied to student achievement test results.

Beyond their concerns with working conditions and salary, teacher unions work directly on *teacher recruitment* in several ways. Especially in AFT-supported districts like New York City, paraprofessionals (classroom aides) and other educational staff increasingly are represented by teacher unions. An idea with currency among several urban unions (including San Francisco and Cleveland) is that paraprofessionals are an attractive population for recruitment into the teaching force because of their

demonstrated commitment to education, their teaching experience in local schools through years of classroom practice, and their familiarity with the communities from which district students live (and are more likely than the population entering teacher education programs to reflect the racial, linguistic and ethnic diversity of those communities). These AFT affiliates negotiate for and directly provide support the movement of paraprofessionals into and through teacher preparation programs so that they can become licensed teachers. Another trend is to attract high school students, particularly from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, to consider teaching careers; Birchwood Education Association's "Teachers Recruiting Future Teachers" project is one such example.

Initiating and Supporting Initial Teacher Education and Ongoing Professional Development

Teachers' professional learning, both prior to and during a teaching career, has long been a significant aspect of teacher unions' efforts, the "other side" of what these organizations offer teachers. Teacher union researchers have overlooked this organizational priority, choosing instead to focus their energies on labor relations and governance issues (see Bascia, 1998a and especially 2000).

State level teacher unions draft legislation and work with other state agencies to create the infrastructure for improved delivery of professional development offerings for teachers. For well over a decade, state and local unions across the US have been collaborating with schools of education to establish professional development schools and other kinds of school-university partnerships in support of improved teacher preparation (see Bascia, 1998a).

Beyond providing their own workshops and a wide variety of *informal learning opportunities* for teachers through governance, curriculum and community development and other organizationally-sponsored activities (Bascia, 2000), teacher unions have taken a major role in initiating and co-sponsoring *innovative forms of professional development* for teachers and, increasingly, for others involved in the educational system (such as administrators and parents). Examples from this study reflect both common and more innovative union initiatives to improve teacher learning across the country. In New York State, NYSUT championed legislation for Teacher Centers, school-based units managed by specially trained teachers to help staff (and parents) develop sustained inquiry habits and create curricular and programmatic strategies for students. Across the country, a number of teacher unions have been the initiators of induction and peer review programs. The UFT supports a peer assistance program to help tenured teachers improve their teaching skills (and counsels them out of teaching if they do not demonstrate improvement). It also sponsors several professional networks for teachers, schedules a wide array of graduate courses and workshops, and pays for time for teachers to meet and to attend conferences.

At the local level, many of the earliest programmatic attempts at providing *support for new teachers* in their first teaching years—commonly known as induction and mentoring initiatives—were initiated by unions, starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s out of a concern that neither principals, district personnel, nor schools of education were adequately helping educators manage the challenging transition into full-time teaching (Bascia, 1994; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). The six union sites in the CTP study are no exception to this trend: in Washington, the BEA persuaded the school district to co-sponsor a mentor program for new teachers, pooling together monies from a WEA innovation grant and local tax levy funds; the program provides networking and professional development activities for new teachers and supports the work of three veteran teachers in classroom coaching. At the state level, the WEA has co-sponsored legislation to provide funds for new teacher programs state-wide,

to be developed jointly by teachers' associations and school districts and based on locally valued priorities.

In recent years, as public dollars for professional development have been reduced or redirected, unions have stepped into the vacuum. They provide professional learning opportunities themselves, work with others (such as school districts and state departments of education) to provide professional development, and are often the major thrust behind the establishment of new structures to institutionalize professional development—at the state level, in Washington, for example, through regional professional development advisory boards, and at the school level, through school-level decision-making (including budgetary discretion) for professional development and action research initiatives, as well as through district-wide professional networks.

In Washington, the WEA provides a range of offerings, many for whole school staffs including administrators, on student assessment, “principles of learning,” models of school leadership, action research, and developing school-community partnerships. The WEA also subsidizes teachers' attendance at conferences and provides staff to work with school district personnel to redefine how professional development is delivered locally. NYSUT has a practice of attempting to persuade legislators to include professional development funds and requirements in any new policy development.

Challenging Student Assessment Frameworks

Assessment and accountability mechanisms are a prominent component of most states' systemic reform strategies; all three states in the CTP sample had newly established student achievement testing requirements. None of the teacher unions in the CTP study were directly involved in developing or establishing the infrastructure for these tests. In New York and North Carolina, the teachers' organizations at best could be said to be accommodating them. In New York and especially in Washington, unions were channels for teachers' concerns that the tests made it more difficult to teach well (“teaching to the test”), for discrepancies between teaching standards and testing programs, and for the inadequacy of resources (for teaching materials, curriculum planning and training) that would support teachers' ability to teach in new ways (see also Carlson, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1997). In Washington, the WEA's dual goals—to reflect teachers' expressed concerns and to support teachers in their work—was reflected in the research department's somewhat incompatible twin strategies: to collect information on how the state testing framework constrained quality teaching, as feedback to state policymakers, and to gather and distribute examples of good practice so that teachers could be more successful in a testing environment.

FACTORS THAT MATTER IN TEACHER REFORM EFFORTS

The activities of the six teacher unions described above parallel the recommendations identified by the National Commission on Teaching for America's Future report (1996)—“getting serious” about teaching standards and licensure; teacher recruitment and retention; reinventing teacher preparation and professional development; and ensuring that school workplaces support teaching and learning. Union efforts in these domains suggest that these organizations may be more than the recalcitrant “dinosaurs” as they are viewed in much of the policy research. The work that has been done in these areas, particularly with respect to attraction and retention and professional development, in some cases are in the forefront of reform development. Some teacher unions appear to be contributing substantively, at various levels and locations of the educational system on a range of initiatives, large and small, to influence policy, provide technical support, and to assume responsibility

for various aspects of the larger educational enterprise that they view as inadequate or unaddressed.

This is, of course, an aggregate assessment. No single organization in the CTP sample had either the intellectual or resource capacity to cover all the bases. A point which will be elaborated upon in the rest of this report is that while such reform-mindedness is a general trend across the six organizations, each did this work in a particular way, to a greater or lesser degree, with varying degrees of success.

Table 2 reveals the range of initiatives and the type of engagement undertaken by the six organizations during the period of the CTP study. “C,” “S,” and “I” refer, respectively, to “Challenging/resisting,” “Supporting/accommodating,” and “Initiating”—the typology of reactions to reform identified by McDonnell and Pascal in their 1988 study.

Table 2. Unions' Engagement with Teacher Quality Initiatives

REFORM	NYSUT	WEA	NCAE	UFT	BEA	PRCTO
Teaching standards	S	S	S/I			
Attraction/Retention		C/I	S/I	I	C/I	
Professional Development	I/S	I/S	I/S	I/S		S
Student Assessment		C/S		C	C	

The CTP study revealed a general tendency across the six organizations for broader mandates, more complex relationships, and more nuanced priorities among teacher unions than previously described in the research. The extent to which these differences should be attributed solely to differences in data collection and analysis strategies between this study and earlier union research or whether these practices represent clear departures from the past cannot be fully known. Past studies’ emphasis on union leaders’ relationships with decision makers, collective bargaining processes and contractual language, and rarer glimpses of union-supported reforms certainly did not reveal either the breadth or depth of union reform activity, the processes by which unions attempt to influence policy making and practice, or the logical coherence between unions’ so-called traditional (or “self-interested”) concerns with material benefits and working conditions and their presumably “enlightened” interest in professional development and teaching standards.

These trends are visible in the aggregate across the cases, but as Table 2 makes clear, the six organizations clearly did not all demonstrate the same ability to effectively improve teacher quality, either through their own efforts or, even more importantly, to persuade others with the ability to do so to work in tandem with them. Since the second half of the 1980s, policy analysts have attempted to make sense of differences in teacher union priorities in several ways. McDonnell and Pascal (1988) maintained that teacher unions resist, accommodate to, or initiate reform according to leaders’ calculations of the relative risk of alienating their members and alienating the external environment (especially policymakers and administrators) with whom they sought benefits. Implicit in McDonnell and Pascal’s typology is an antipathy between (conservative) teachers and (enlightened) policymakers. A distaste for unions that pursue traditional “bread and butter” issues such as salary and working conditions and approval for those who favor more recognizably “professionally”-oriented initiatives has been the most common reactions of educational researchers in recent decades (see Bascia, 1998b). As this report suggests, however, simple or narrow compliance with policy directions is not the only or even necessarily always the best strategy for teacher

unions. Assessing these organizations' contributions to teacher quality provides an opportunity to suggest an alternative to this dichotomy.

While unions often have been viewed in the research as if they were primarily platforms for union leaders, it is useful to consider their internal workings as formal organizations (Bascia, 1999, 2000, in press) and their roles as political players in the larger policy making environment of districts and states (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1981). Such internal and external organizational analyses help explain the extent of teacher unions' effectiveness in promoting teacher quality. The six cases illustrate how both internal organizational capacity and characteristics of the external environment make a difference.

Internal Capacity

While superintendents and principals provide uniquely important roles, the success of districts and schools for teaching and learning are obviously greater than their administrative heads: as research has clearly demonstrated, other actors and factors also contribute to the nature and effectiveness of these organizations. Enlightened leadership is certainly one dimension of teacher union success in promoting teacher quality, but this study suggests that the reality is more nuanced and complex. Of the six cases, the NCAE suggests the potentially fragile quality of a union agenda based so wholly on the work of a single official and his personal relationship with a single decision maker; the UFT, on the other hand, has continued to deepen and broaden its efforts through and beyond the leadership of three very charismatic but different presidents. Intellectual capacity—the ability to gather and make use of information, generate ideas, to make sense of challenging conditions and to see a clear direction to move—requires more than the skills of a single enlightened leader. It requires the recognition that the organization needs to continually be aware of and adapt to changing social conditions, the willingness and ability to seek out new ideas, to try new strategies and to learn from mistakes, to take on multiple projects simultaneously, to eschew orthodoxy in terms of relationships with both teachers and decision makers, to be simultaneously protectionist and reforming.

This ongoing organizational learning can be deliberately fostered by paying attention to union structure and dynamics: by minimizing boundaries between the organization and the field, by minimizing internal organizational fragmentation and balkanization, and by seeking information and ideas voraciously and from multiple sources (see Bascia, 2000 and especially Bascia, in press, for a description of a Canadian teachers' association that exhibits these characteristics).

It is easy for teachers' organization staff, like other educational bureaucrats, to lose touch with educational practice, especially if staff and officials spend little time in the field or if they tend to come from a limited range of educational backgrounds. It is all too common for teachers' organizations to be driven by the needs and interests of one group of educators and ignore another (for example, elementary vs. secondary, urban vs. suburban). The BEA case exemplifies how a group of veteran teachers, close to retirement, has been in leadership for many years, the ensuing lack of clarity about the future of the organization, and perhaps why BEA membership was willing to sacrifice the ability to attract new teachers by rejecting an increase in new teachers' salaries in favor of across-the-board salary increases. Careful attention to intra- and inter-organizational dynamics, attracting educators from different work contexts, encouraging a range of special interest groups and fostering mutually respectful working relationships between elected officials and staff all help expand the range of information and ideas at the organization's disposal. The UFT exemplifies this best: by hiring educators from many backgrounds, it can provide a wide array of organizational services and fulfill multiple priorities. The WEA case, on the other hand,

reveals some of the tensions that can exist between elected officials and organized staff that in other unions (see for example Bascia, in press) are mitigated by careful organizational planning.

Another type of organizational capacity, of course, is derived from a union's resource base. Organizational size and diversification play a role in a union's ability to extend its efforts across multiple arenas of activity. Fiscal resources—collected from a sizeable membership base, the ability to recognize the potential value of grants from affiliate organizations and other sources of money (e.g., foundations, state departments of education, partners)—create opportunities to launch, support, or challenge the policy initiatives of others. All things else being equal, larger district unions clearly have an edge over smaller locals; state level organizations have the potential to do many things (though their distance from local classrooms and teachers' organizational loyalty can be a problem—see Bascia, 1994; Olson, 1965). The size, talents and diversity of staff are also an important dimension of teacher unions' resource base: the more productive unions recruit individuals with practical experience in a variety of domains, provide them with a range of activities and contacts to enhance their understanding of how work effectively within the larger educational system, and enable them to develop their skills and interests over a number of years to enhance their commitment and knowledge base. Balancing democratizing strategies that potentially bring more, and more diverse, leaders into the organization with strategies to ensure that individuals have opportunities to learn over many years how to navigate the broader educational system is an important organizational skill.

External Capacity

Teacher unions do not function in a vacuum; they work within the larger educational milieu. Previous sections have noted the social, legal, and fiscal realities that shape unions' work. Even more fundamentally, teacher unions must contend with what might be called the operative discursive or conceptual framework that underlies current educational policy goals. Two sets of related notions seem especially germane to how deeply and effectively unions can contribute to educational reform. The first pertains to prevailing thinking about teaching and teachers; the second focuses more specifically on assumptions about teacher unions themselves.

As noted earlier, the prevailing model of systemic reform emphasizes centralized state control and a strengthened administrative structure, standards, and policies that emphasize compliance, and reduced funding for education and a significant turnover within the teaching force. This model and these conditions have emerged from but also have reinforced a conception of teaching as technical work and teachers as technicians (see Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997). This conception of teaching stands in sharp contrast with the prevailing assumptions embedded in the reforms of the later 1980s, which viewed teaching as intellectual work. Expectations that good teaching is a matter of obedience and compliance, and that poor teaching is the result of resistance, deny the possibility of both informed judgment by teachers and the importance of the quality of teachers' working conditions—fiscal and human resources, professional relationships, opportunities to learn, and so on.

When a technical conception of teaching prevails, teachers' concerns as expressed through their unions are viewed as insubordination or irrelevance. Further, when a technical conception of teaching prevails, unions must necessarily focus on attempting to improve basic conditions. The BEA case exemplifies, unfortunately, the common situation where unions and district decision makers are caught in a seemingly irresolvable dynamic. The BEA and other Washington locals' ability to put pressure on the state affiliate caused the redirection and focusing of the WEA's efforts toward

increasing teacher compensation. The PRCTO case exemplifies settings where teachers are not assumed to have much to contribute to the shape of educational practice.

Related to prevailing conceptions of teachers are assumptions about the actual and potential roles of their organizations. The limits of teacher unions' legal purview contribute to a view of these organizations as labor- rather than professionally-oriented (see Carlson, 1992; Larson, 1977; Mitchell & Kerchner, 1983). Labor unions lack the credibility as well as the right to influence policy or shape practice; in New York City, administrators were mixed in their views of UFT staff's desire to shape practice at school and district levels, much as they appreciated (and in some cases relied upon) the union's resource base in light of the district's infrastructure needs. When unions are marginalized, as the UFT and the BEA cases illustrate, organizational staff must devote time and energy establishing and reestablishing their credibility with decision makers.

While outside the purview of the CTP data set, analyses of contemporary conditions elsewhere are helpful: in this case, they can demonstrate both some common trends and provide more vivid, extreme examples of dynamics within the CTP cases. In Canada, where provinces have comparable authority to U.S. states over educational policy and where "triage" reform is also the current model, teachers' organizations have recently lost significant ground with respect to the terms and purview of bargaining and their roles in helping shape provincial education policy (Bascia, 1999; 2002, in press). In the U.S., some unions (like the UFT and WEA) have actually managed to claim high moral ground and to take advantage of emerging gaps in service delivery to shape the nature of school programs (developing curriculum, providing professional development and even defining the terms of school based management frameworks). But others have responded in increasingly reactive ways, urging teachers to refuse to comply with government mandates, offering fewer supports for teaching, and engendering increased tensions with the public as well as with their members. The tensions experienced by the UFT and WEA, like some of their Canadian counterparts, suggest that possessing sufficient internal capacity to "take the high road" with respect to educational reform is necessary, but it is not sufficient in policy settings where teacher unions are extremely disadvantaged relative to the power of the formal administrative hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

Analyses of the activities of six teacher unions—three at the state and three at the district level—reveal that these organizations are more deeply and broadly involved in educational reform, and in improving teacher quality in particular, than previous research has suggested. To a greater or lesser extent, these diverse organizations—large and small, with reputations for reform and with reputations for resistance to reform—demonstrate committed involvement in improving the quality of teaching and learning by investing in relationships with administrators, policy makers and others, and by supporting and initiating a range of reform projects.

In relation to the current educational policy priorities of most states, teacher unions have actively supported the articulation and implementation of teaching standards. They have supported and, more significantly, initiated improvements in attraction and retention and in professional development for teachers. They have challenged student assessment policies and practices where teachers believe they inhibit good teaching, directly or indirectly. Especially in the areas of attraction and retention and professional development, teacher unions have developed some of the most innovative and substantive programs and have worked actively to create the infrastructure to institutionalize them. This capacity to conceptualize and work to implement programs and practices to improve teacher quality by challenging,

supporting, and initiating reform strategies—taking stock of current conditions and filling in or compensating for inadequacies in support for teaching quality—suggests that it is useful to think about unions’ value as contributing to a “tapestry” of reform. It suggests that the “triage” model of reform that currently drives educational policy making and practice may not be appropriate or adequate for judging unions’ contributions to reform. Further, it suggests that the familiar dichotomy between union support for traditional “bread and butter” or “professional” concerns is not necessarily the best way to assess whether unions are on the right track. A more productive standard might be the extent to which teacher unions can persuasively articulate the positive relationship between teaching and learning quality such that policy makers and administrators in the greater educational system are persuaded to work with them rather than against or in spite of them.

Teacher unions that accomplish this work do so through a series of deliberate organizational strategies that involve staff with diverse skills in ongoing relationships with other players in the educational environment. Such unions invest organizational effort into ensuring their ability to continue to be responsive to changing conditions in the realms of practice and policy making. Their intellectual and resource capacities as organizations make important differences in their ability to carry out this work. Changing notions about teaching, teachers, and teacher unions prevailing in the larger educational environment also have strong effects on their success. Over at least the past couple of decades teacher unions have contributed substantively to the capacity of the educational system at classroom, school, district, state, and national levels, in ways that are particularly salient during an era of reduced funding and infrastructure support for education. Their ability to do this is somewhat tenuous where and when teachers experience inadequate support from the system as a whole.

It is not necessarily productive to recommend specific types of actions for teacher unions or specific types of responses for those who work with them. Teacher unions are not uniform in their goals, abilities, or successes; indeed, their strength lies in their ability to respond to changing conditions, to recognize gaps and to invent new solutions, and in their two-way relationships with their teacher-members and policy makers. It might be useful, however, to spell out the unique contributions they make and could make: they are sites for creativity and innovation, for professional learning, and for developing and fostering educational leadership for individuals and for educational systems. They also serve a corrective function, a reality check when policy and practice lead to reduced support for teacher quality. The multiple functions teacher unions provide are critical to educational improvement.

REFERENCES

- Adler, L. & Gardner, S. (1994). *The politics of linking schools and social services*. A politics of education yearbook. Southport, UK: Falmer Press.
- Bacharach, S. B., & Mitchell, S. M. (1981). Interest group politics in school districts: The case of local teachers' unions. In Samuel B. Bacharach, (Ed.) *Organizational behavior in schools and school districts*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 495-526.
- Bailey, B. (2000). The impact of mandated change on teachers. In N. Bascia & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), *The sharp edge of educational change: Teaching, leading and the realities of reform*, pp. 112-128. London: The Falmer Press.
- Bascia, N. (1990). Teachers' evaluations of unions. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5(4), 301-313, Fall.
- Bascia, N. (1994). *Unions in teachers' professional lives: Social, intellectual and practical concerns*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bascia, N. (1997). Invisible leadership: The roles of union-active teachers in schools. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*.
- Bascia, N. (1998a). Teacher unions and educational reform. In A. Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, M. Fullan, & D. Hopkins (Eds.) *International handbook of educational change*. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Bascia, N. (1998b). Teacher unions and teacher professionalism: Rethinking a familiar dichotomy. In B. Biddle, T. Good, & I. Goodson (Eds.), *International handbook of teachers and teaching*. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Bascia, N. (1998c). The next steps in teacher union research and reform. *Contemporary Education* 69(4), 210-213.
- Bascia, N. (1999). Collective bargaining under fire. *Orbit*. Toronto: OISE/ University of Toronto.
- Bascia, N. (2000). The other side of the equation: Professional development and the organizational capacity of teachers' organizations. *Education Policy*.
- Bascia, N. (2001). Do teacher unions have demonstrated potential to promote positive forms of pedagogical, curricular and organizational change that benefit student learning? *Journal of Educational Change* 2(2), 65-70.
- Bascia, N. (2002). Canadian teacher unions and educational reform. Paper presented at conference on Unions and Educational Reform, sponsored by National Association for Excellence in Education, Vancouver & Toronto, February 12 & 14, 2002.
- Bascia, N. (in press). Learning through struggle: How the Alberta Teachers Association maintains an even keel. In K. Church, N. Bascia & E. Shrage (Eds.), *Informal learning: Making sense of lived experience in turbulent times*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier Press.
- Bascia, N. (forthcoming). Canadian teacher unions and educational reform. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*.
- Bascia, N. & Hargreaves, A. (2000). The sharp edge of change. In N. Bascia & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), *The sharp edge of educational change: Teaching, leading and the realities of reform*, pp. 3-27. London: The Falmer Press.
- Bascia, N., Stiegelbauer, S., Watson, N., Jacka, N., & Fullan, M. (1997). *Teacher associations and school reform: Building stronger connections*. External review of the

-
- NCI Learning Laboratories Initiative. Prepared for the National Education Association, Washington, D.C. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.
- Bradley, A. (1996). Education's "dark continent." *Education Week*, December 4.
- Broadfoot, P., & Osborn, M. (1993). *Perceptions of teaching: Primary school teachers in England and France*. London: Cassell.
- Carlson, D. (1992). *Teachers and Crisis. Urban School Reform and Teachers' Work Culture*. New York: Routledge Chapman & Hall.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1992). Communities for teacher research: Fringe or forefront? *American Journal of Education*, 100, 298-324.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Earl, L., Bascia, N., Hargreaves, A., & Jacka, N. (1998). *Teachers and teaching in changing times: A glimpse of Canadian teachers in 1998*. Report prepared for the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Toronto: International Centre for Educational Change, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.
- Englert, R. (1979). Collective bargaining in public education: Conflict and its context. *Education and Urban Society*, 11(2), 255-269.
- Gitlin, A. (1996) Gender and professionalization: An institutional analysis of teacher education and unionism at the turn of the twentieth century. *Teachers College Record*, 97(4), 588-624.
- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times*. London: Cassell.
- Johnson, S. (1983). Teacher unions in schools: Authority and accommodation. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53(3), 309-326.
- Johnson, S. (1984). *Teacher unions in schools*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Johnson, S. (1987). Can schools be reformed at the bargaining table? *Teachers College Record*, 89(2), 269-280.
- Johnson, S. (1988). Pursuing professional reform in Cincinnati. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(10), 746-751.
- Johnson, S. M. (1990). *Teachers at work: Achieving success in our schools*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kerchner, C., & Koppich, J.E. (1993). *A union of professionals: Labor relations and educational reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kerchner, C., & Mitchell, D. (1986). Teaching reform and union reform. *Elementary School Journal*, 86(4), 449-470.
- Kerchner, C., & Mitchell, D. (1988). *The changing idea of a teacher's union*. Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- Knapp, M S. (1997). Between systemic reforms and the mathematics and science classroom: The dynamics of innovation, implementation and professional learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(2), 227-266.
- Larson, M. S. (1977). *The rise of professionalism: A sociological analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lichtenstein, G., McLaughlin, M. W., & Knudsen, J. (1992). Teacher empowerment
-

-
- and professional knowledge. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *The changing contexts of teaching*. Chicago: NSSE Yearbook, University of Chicago Press.
- Lieberman, A. & Bascia, N. (1991). *The trust agreement: A cooperative labor compact*. Report for the Stuart Foundations. Berkeley: Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE).
- Louis, K. S. (1990). Social and community values and the quality of teachers' work life. In M. W. McLaughlin, J. E. Talbert, & N. Bascia (Eds.), *The contexts of teaching in secondary schools: Teachers' realities* (pp. 17-39). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Martin Macke, S. (1998). Teacher unionism: Back to the future. *Contemporary Education* 69(4), 180-181.
- McClure, R. (1991). Individual growth and institutional renewal. In A. Lieberman and L. Miller (eds.), *Staff development for education in the '90s*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- McDonnell, L. & Elmore, R. (1991). Getting the job done: Alternative policy instruments. In A. R. Odden (Ed.), *Educational policy implementation* (157-184). Albany: SUNY Press.
- McDonnell, L. M., & Pascal, A. (1988). *Teacher unions and educational reform*. Washington, D.C.: RAND Corporation.
- McLaughlin, M. (1993) What matters most in teachers' workplace context? In J. W. Little & M. W. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Teachers' work: Individuals, colleagues, and contexts* 79-103. New York: Teachers College Press.
- McLaughlin, M. & Talbert, J. (2001). *Professional communities and the work of high school teaching*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McLaughlin, M., & Yee, S. (1988). School as a place to have a career. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Building a professional culture in schools*, 23-44. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Mitchell, D. E. & Kerchner, C.T. (1983). Labor relations and teacher policy. In L. S. Shulman & G. Sykes, *Handbook of Teaching and Policy*. 214-38.
- Murray, C. & Grant, G.(1998). Teacher peer review: Possibility of pipedream? *Contemporary Education* 69(4), 202-204.
- National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (1996). *What matters most: Teaching for America's future*. New York: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future.
- Ogawa, R. (1994). The institutional sources of educational reform: The case of school-based management. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31(3), 519-548.
- Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Peterson, B. & M. Charney (1999). *Transforming teacher unions: Fighting for better schools and social justice*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, Inc.
- Rauth, M. (1990). Exploring heresy in collective bargaining and school restructuring. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 71(10) 781-790.
- Rosow, J. & Zager, R. (1989). *Allies in education reform*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

-
- Russo, J. (1979). Changes in bargaining structures: The implications of the Serrano decision. *Education and Urban Society*, 11(2), 208-218.
- Shields, P., & Knapp, M. (1997). The promise and limits of school-based reform: A national snapshot. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(4), 288-294.
- Simpkins, E., McCutcheon, A., & Alec, R. (1979). Arbitration and policy issues in school contracts. *Education and Urban Society*, 11(2), 241-254.
- Smith, M., & O'Day, J. (1990). Systemic school reform. In S. Fuhrman & B. Malen (Eds.) *The politics of curriculum and testing* (223-268). Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.
- Timar, T. (1989). The politics of school restructuring. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 71(4), pp. 264-275.
- Tyack, D., & Hansot, E. (1982). *Managers of virtue: Public school leadership in America, 1820-1980*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Urban, W. J. (1982). *Why teachers organized*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Werner, W. (1991). Curriculum and uncertainty. In R. Ghosh & D. Ray (Eds.) *Social change and education in canada*, 2nd edition. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Whitty, G., Powers, S. & Halpin, D. (1998). *Devolution and choice in education: The state, the school and the market*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Williams, R. (1979). The impact of collective bargaining on the principal: What do we know? *Education and Urban Society*, 11(2), 168-180.

CTP Research Reports

The Center's Research Report series presents the findings of CTP studies, analyses, reviews, and conceptual work. In addition to internal review by Center members, each report has been reviewed externally by at least two scholars and revised in light of the reviewers' comments and suggestions. Along with CTP Working Papers, Policy Briefs, and Occasional Papers, these reports are available for download from the Center's website: www.ctpweb.org

Center Affiliates

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education
American Federation of Teachers
Council for Chief State School Officers
National Alliance of Business
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National School Boards Association
National Staff Development Council
National Urban League

American Association of School Administrators
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
International Reading Association
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
National Governors' Association
National Science Teachers Association
National Urban Coalition
Teachers Union Reform Network

Center Team

Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Michael Knapp, Center Director
James Banks
Elizabeth Dutro
Margaret Plecki
Sam Wineburg
Sheila Valencia

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Linda Darling-Hammond
Pamela Grossman
Milbrey McLaughlin
Joan Talbert

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Deborah Loewenberg Ball
David Cohen
Edward Silver

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Thomas Corcoran
Richard Ingersoll

Researchers at Other Institutions

Barnett Berry, University of North Carolina
Robert Floden, Michigan State University
David Monk, Pennsylvania State University
Jon Snyder, Bank Street College
Judy Swanson, Education Matters, Inc.
Suzanne Wilson, Michigan State University

Contact Information

Michael S. Knapp, Center Director

Miller Hall M201, College of Education
University of Washington, Box 353600
Seattle, WA 98195-3600
email: mknapp@u.washington.edu

Michele C. Ferguson, Center Manager

Miller Hall 203C, College of Education
University of Washington, Box 353600
Seattle, WA 98195-3600
Phone: (206) 221-4114
FAX: (206) 616-6762
email: ctpmail@u.washington.edu

Sally Brown, Communications Director

Miller Hall 404B, College of Education
University of Washington, Box 353600
Seattle, WA 98195-3600
Phone: (206) 543-5319
FAX: (206) 616-6762
email: salbrown@u.washington.edu

Web Address

<http://www.ctpweb.org>

