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Restructuring Students for Restructured Work: The Economy, School Reform, and Non-college-bound Youths

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The U.S. business community charges that the education, discipline, and motivation of non-college-bound students and young workers are poor because of defects in the public schools and the lack of proper family socialization. A direct outgrowth of these charges has been the greater involvement of business in schools and educational reform efforts and an increase in educational policies that emphasize children at risk. This article, however, contends that the fundamental changes in wages, jobs, and future opportunities in the labor market since 1980 have had negative effects on these youths' school outcomes and motivation and discipline as new workers and that the literature and the authors' case study suggest that these economic changes have played a major role in shaping the current "educational crisis."

Since the mid-1980s, business leaders, governmental officials, and policy analysts have voiced their concerns about the processes and outcomes of public education in the United States and have called for its reform. The claim that schools fail to prepare youths to enter the work force is a central component of their critique and is linked to the widely held belief that "information-age" jobs require better educated workers. Critics charge that unprepared youths are largely responsible for the problems that U.S. corporations face in competing in international markets. Kearns and Doyle (1988) articulated the general critique of the schools by asserting that public education has put the United States at a terrible competitive disadvantage; they seek the complete restructuring of schools using the business model of corporate restructuring.

Analysts with opposing views charge that business leaders have tried to transfer the blame for the competitiveness problem from the economy to the schools (Apple 1989). Perrow (1986, p. 269)

bluntly remarked that "schools may be the scapegoats of political and economic policies; the . . . emphasis on failing schools may simply disguise a failing economic system that cannot use an abundance of skilled young people." The analysis presented in this article extends Apple's and Perrow's work by examining why young workers appear to be unsuited for contemporary work.

In this article, we integrate published data with findings from a case study we conducted to formulate a general conceptualization of an important but usually unarticulated goal of the school reform movement: to restructure students, especially non-college-bound students, to be better disciplined and more highly motivated workers. Thus, we begin by defining the terms *discipline* and *motivation*. These characteristics have been difficult historically for economic leaders to elicit from their work forces, as our discussion of the 1910s suggests. We then summarize the current problems, which U.S. corporate leaders perceive as

obstacles to global economic competitiveness.

Next, drawing from data collected from our case study of a local task force on the reform of schools, we offer empirical data to support the assertion that allegedly weak motivation and discipline in the new work force undergird the extensive concern that business has about U.S. public elementary and secondary education.

We then strive to show that corporations' restructuring activities of the past several years generated an important set of factors that lay the foundations for the perceived or actual deficits in discipline and motivation among non-college-bound students and non-college-educated young workers. Block (1990) also observed that too many analysts neglect the wide range of factors that may influence the discipline and motivation of workers. Thus, the task force members we observed and analysts and advocates of national school reform neglect the possibility that the conditions in the U.S. economy in general or the consequences of corporate restructuring in particular have implications for the discipline and motivation of high school students and new workers.

By suggesting the connections between unmotivated and undisciplined students and young workers and restructured job opportunities, we seek to modify the tendency among social scientists, noted by Wexler (1987), to compartmentalize the new sociology of education and political economy. We illustrate how both educational outcomes and educational reform efforts are associated with wider social changes, especially economic crises, and with the contradictory effects of efforts to resolve the crises.

DISCIPLINE AND MOTIVATION

Discipline and motivation may be broadly conceptualized using Durkheim's (1933, 1951) categories of social regulation and social integration. In this usage, discipline and motivation are the opposite of anomie. More precisely, we define discipline as orderly cooperation, following Weber (1978), or Clegg's (1989)

reading of Weber, as rationalized obedience. And we define motivation roughly, following Donnelly (1988), as a passionate engagement to achieve a valued goal. Although Wexler (1987) noted the contradiction between rationality and passion, this contradiction does not appear to deter business leaders from seeking both attributes.

Early Business Concerns

Many scholars (e.g., Katznelson and Weir 1988; Timpane 1988) observed that the interest of business in educational reform has never been more intense than now, with the possible exception of the educational reform movement early in this century. During that period, business leaders and others mobilized to intervene in education to fashion a disciplined, motivated "Americanized" work force through a variety of reforms. In particular, the schools were to be reshaped in the image of the rapidly emerging modern, organized factory system following Taylorist and scientific management principles (Fischer and Mandell 1988; Grubb and Lazerson 1982; Heydebrand and Burris 1984; Hogan 1982; Katz 1968; Nelson-Rowe 1991; Wrigley 1982).

Supposedly education would also help solve one of the company owners' key disciplinary problems of the mid-1910s—the high rates of voluntary turnover among workers (Douglas 1918; Ray 1989)—that some attributed to illiteracy (Benge 1920; Simons 1921).

By 1916 the business community and the federal government regarded turnover as a "national menace" (Hotchkiss 1923), especially because of the labor shortage caused by the onset of the United States' involvement in World War I and the halting of immigration between 1915 and 1920 (Bernstein 1960). The regulation and control of the work force, often provided by large numbers of the unemployed, eroded as unemployment dropped from a high of 15 percent in 1915, to 9.1 percent in 1916, and to 2.4 percent in 1918 (Montgomery 1974).

Worker turnover was a problem not only because business owners were be-

ginning to understand it as an economic cost, but because of its negative consequences for the stability of work gangs (Jones 1916, p. 189), or orderly cooperation. Furthermore, turnover was cited as an example of the alleged erosion of the "effort norm" (Jacoby 1985, p. 33), or motivation.

Irrespective of its cause, the responsibility for industrial problems, such as the lack of discipline and motivation of workers, fell then as now to the educational system (Gilbert 1977). A major task of school reform was to create the social and moral character to settle social turmoil, cement social division, and promote stability (Wexler undated). As Kantor (1986) pointed out, during that period, the concern shifted from an economy characterized by poverty, low wages, and degrading work to the schools. The schools, rather than the labor market, were to supply the solutions.

Recent Business Concerns

Corporate leaders' active intervention in the educational process again became intense in the 1980s. Although it had often been engaged with the schools, the business community had retreated from public school activism by the late 1960s. The politics of the "contentious" issues of equity and civil rights, business leaders believed, were too time consuming and volatile (Trachtman 1988). Frederick Edelstein, an educational policy analyst with the National Alliance of Business, noted, in an interview on March 7, 1990, that in local communities, business leaders preferred to stay off "the front page over controversial issues" like teachers' strikes and school desegregation. Thus, during the late 1960s and much of the 1970s, he stated, the participation of business leaders on "school boards dwindled, and . . . [executives of] major corporations who traditionally served on school boards no longer served." What, then, fueled the renewed interest of business in the public schools in the 1980s? Several economic, demographic, and political changes converged to create what Perry

(1988), a business writer, and many others began to term the "education crisis."

THE "PRODUCTIVITY CRISIS"

The calls for the reform of public education in the 1980s and 1990s may be understood within the context of the "productivity crisis" (now termed the "competitiveness problem"), identified in the mid-1970s. Corporate leaders, while seeking changes in national policies, such as deregulation (Block and Burns 1986), and an expansion of *laissez-faire* capitalism (Kuttner 1991) to address their productivity problems, also began experimenting with internal methods to solve the crisis. Two methods that gained strength in the early 1980s are important for understanding the perspectives that have guided business-led attempts to reform the schools: corporate culture and corporate restructuring. These methods are important because advocates of contemporary school reform borrow features from both in their prescriptions for reforming public education.

Corporate culture, defined here as a management technique (Ray 1986), was promoted as one internal method to improve productivity (Pascale 1985; Peters and Waterman 1982). Company leaders utilize intense methods for socializing employees to their firms' clearly articulated values and goals to elicit their devotion to the firms. The strong-culture firm, relying heavily on ceremony, ritual, and symbolism, ostensibly furnishes the passion and emotion that heighten motivation and thereby foster "excellent," that is to say, "productive" companies. This technique ensures discipline and motivation because all organizational participants presumably share the same vision. The primary emphasis is on social integration (Ray 1986) as the company becomes quasi-sacred, in Durkheim's (1961) terms, with its workers transformed into devout members.

The second widely practiced method used to respond to the productivity crisis was corporate restructuring. In the 1980s, companies began to become "lean

and mean" by trimming all excess "fat," usually employees—often senior high-wage employees. Bloated bureaucracies and tall hierarchical arrangements were restructured as sleeker, flatter organizations. "Slimmed down," less bureaucratically organized firms, their advocates believe, are more productive (Russell 1987).

The productivity crisis, however, continued to vex the corporate community. As Wexler (1987) pointed out, during periods of crisis, ruling classes more intensely seek to reorganize and restructure social institutions. Thus by the mid-1980s, corporate elites again turned their attention to institutions that were external to the internal corporate environment to improve their new work force, thereby improving their productivity and their competitive capacity in global markets. The social institution of public education became an important target.

Renewed Interest in Educational Reform

Corporate leaders' perceptions of the renewed need for their involvement in educational reform were heightened by *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983). Informants who are knowledgeable about the current school reform movement claim that the report "confirmed cocktail party fears" (Denis Doyle, interview, March 7, 1990), and "tapped into" pent-up business concerns (Chester Finn, interview, March 6, 1990) about public education. The report, which insisted that there are strong links between the economic decline of the United States and the allegedly weak public schools, was directed implicitly at business leaders.

At about the same time, President Reagan and Secretary of Education Bell spoke out strongly in favor of increased business support to education as a way to compensate for the decreased public financial support and cuts in federal spending for education. The federal share of expenses for elementary and secondary education dropped from 8.7 percent to 6.2 percent of the total expen-

ditures for education from 1981 to 1989 (Clark and Asuto 1989), and the proportion of the U.S. federal budget for elementary and secondary education dropped from 2.5 percent to 1.8 percent during the Reagan years (Clark and Asuto 1989). Reagan charged that federal aid to education had failed and that businesses and the states should expand their leadership in education (Useem 1986).

In 1985, the Committee for Economic Development (CED) issued an influential report, prepared mainly by business leaders, that asserted that the United States and its business community must no longer neglect children and that business programs directed toward poor children were necessary investments for a healthy economy and society. This report, in tandem with the shrinking federal outlays for public elementary and secondary education, marked the onset of corporate leaders' increased formal involvement in educational reform.

New Workers and the Competitiveness Problem

Heralded by the popular press, a labor shortage moved into the forefront of corporate leaders' concerns in 1987 (Church 1987; "Help Wanted" 1987; Shapiro and Walsh 1987). This labor shortage has important implications for understanding corporate leaders' frustrations about the labor force. As was the case during the World War I years, relatively tight labor markets weaken organizational leaders' ability to manage and control employees effectively (Ramsey 1977; Ray 1989).

The reported low unemployment rate also made the national business community uncomfortable, particularly about the low-wage end of the jobs spectrum. Because of this labor shortage, company owners were forced to hire those who had been previously labeled unemployed. Their perception of the situation may be summarized as this: Not only is the product of the educational system defective, there is a shortage of it. The "demographic crunch" (Frederick Edelman interview, March 7, 1990), more-

over, is expected to worsen as the size of the 16–24-year-old cohort declines from nearly 23 percent of the population in 1978 to a projected 15–16 percent in 1995 (William T. Grant Foundation 1988b).

More recently, additional projections of the work force in the near future began to disturb the business community even further. The widely cited report by the Hudson Institute (1987) estimated that by 2000, 83 percent of the new work force will consist of minorities, women, and immigrants. This type of work force is regarded as a problem because of the “deprived backgrounds and low education levels that characterize a disproportionate number of these employees” (Kovach and Pearce 1990, p. 54). Moreover, another report noted, this is not the preferred labor pool of white men that businesses wish to hire (Houk 1989). Although the 83 percent figure was revealed recently as an editorial error—30 percent of the new work force in 2000 will be white men (“Business,” 1990)—the 17 percent figure took on a life of its own, creating much consternation among corporate elites (see, e.g., E. Graham 1989; Teltsch 1988).

Virtually simultaneous with the discovery of a labor shortage, various accounts of the educational crisis increased the justifications for reforming the public schools, which gained momentum in mid-1987. Reports about education began to emphasize the “children at risk” (CED 1987). A careful reading of this material shows that a new perspective was gaining currency. It was not necessarily schools that needed to be restructured and reformed but *particular youngsters in them*, specifically white and minority working-class and low-income students who are most likely to drop out of school or who will have “flimsy” high school diplomas.

Hilgarten and Bosk (1988) suggested that two putative social problems sometimes become linked. In the case under discussion, the children at risk and a labor shortage were linked and, moreover, associated with public elementary and secondary education. As the report of the local task force we studied indicated, the blame for U.S. capitalists’

weakness in world markets is placed increasingly on working-class and low-income students. These youths, it is claimed, later become undisciplined and unmotivated workers because their parents and the schools allegedly fail to socialize them to be disciplined and motivated.

It is within this context that Kearns and Doyle (1988) insisted that schools transmit three sets of values: democracy, citizenship, and the workplace. Honing in on the workplace, they specified the values of “punctuality, neatness, and civility.” Furthermore, they claimed that education must shape and modify acceptable and appropriate social and academic behavior.

Kearns and Doyle are not the only observers who have accentuated the need for schools to concentrate more heavily on teaching values. Many other critics (e.g., Doyle 1989; Glazer 1990; Schneider 1990) of the public schools have emphasized the loss of traditional values among at-risk youngsters because of single-parent families, working mothers, poverty, and drug usage. Business writers, continuing to emphasize the allegedly inadequate parental socialization, have declared that schools must take over familylike roles to nurture the growing number of poor or troubled children and fill the gap left by working mothers (Erllich 1988; Perry 1988). Thus, because the “ideal family has disintegrated,” the schools must instill values, goals, and discipline (Walters 1989). These expressions harken back to the 1910s, when a former superintendent of the Chicago schools asserted: “We must realize from the start that the moral reformation of the child is more important than the sharpening of his intellect” (quoted in Wrigley 1982, p. 66).

The new workplace arrangements supplied clues for new educational arrangements, as was the case in the Progressive Era when factory images, scientific management, and Taylorism were applied to the reform of the schools (Doyle 1987; Fischer and Mandell 1988; Tyack 1990). The strong socialization aspects of corporate culture and the organizational restructuring of schools were pronounced school-reform themes by the onset of the 1990s.

Corporate restructuring was one model used to justify the reduction and decentralization of school district bureaucracies. The school reform agendas that call for clearly defined values in individual schools are reminiscent of the corporate-culture model. Both are captured nicely, for example, in Chubb and Moe's (1990) controversial prescriptions for school reform, although John E. Chubb, of the Brookings Institution, dismissed the influence of this model in an interview on March 6, 1990.

The competitiveness problem, federal cuts in spending on education, and the Reagan administration's calls for corporate activism in public education both garnered and legitimated corporate leaders' interest in educational reform. The projected labor shortage, combined with the disciplinary and motivational problems associated with "kids at risk," converged to form further compelling justifications for the business community's intervention into discussions of school reform.

A CASE STUDY

The ubiquitous national-level discussions and debates about school reform eventually filtered down to the state and municipal levels. At the local level, the concern about deficits in discipline and motivation, rather than educational weaknesses, was pronounced.

The Charlotte, North Carolina, Chamber of Commerce Task Force on Education and Jobs was formed in late 1987 and continued through July of 1988. Its members included local (and a few regional and state) business leaders, educators, elected officials, and civic notables. Its formal mission was to identify the work-force needs of the business community, assess the extent to which the schools were meeting these needs, and propose reforms. We acted as observers in the field; for further details about our methods and other findings, see Ray and Mickelson (1989, 1990) and Mickelson and Ray (1990).¹

¹ Our case-study methods followed those suggested by Yin (1988). We attended all meetings of the task force and business subcommittee; kept field notes and interpre-

Our field notes show that the business leaders' primary concern was the poor behavioral and attitudinal traits of young workers and that the latter's level of academic skills was of secondary concern. Members of the task force first defined the problems facing the local business community as public education *per se*. Later, they altered the definition to claim that the major problem was low-income and working-class white and minority students, not the schools or even weak education. They concluded that the educators' essential task was to reform and modify these students.

During the first business subcommittee meeting, the members (who included corporate officers of several large firms and owners of small businesses) complained about new workers' lack of maturity, reliability, and failure to arrive at work on time and only incidentally mentioned the workers' poor "educational qualifications." A few weeks later, 24 owners and officers of small businesses, who met under the auspices of the subcommittee, also spoke far more frequently and strongly about discipline and motivation than about academic and vocational training. The following are some of their comments:

Kids seem to think they can get rich quick.

There's a lack of motivation that's not being taught.

They need to learn to do what people tell them to.

[Schools] need to reinstate the value system.

[Workers] need to do more than just be there.

Kids need social discipline that understands and respects authority.

It's like they have their own union 'cause they can just go down the street and get another job.

tive journals; and collected and analyzed the task force's documents, reports, and surveys. We conducted, taped, and later transcribed in-depth interviews with key members of the task force using an interview protocol as a loose guide. In 1990 we conducted two- to three-hour interviews—also taped and transcribed—with policy analysts in government, research institutions, and public-interest organizations in Washington, DC, and Boston.

The business leaders, then, characterized the problems with new workers as a lack of discipline and motivation at school and in the workplace. This finding is congruent with that of Braddock and McPartland (1987), who found that attitudinal traits are more important to employers than is educational training. Similarly, the Commission on the Skills of the American Work Force (1990) reported that 80 percent of the business leaders it sampled sought a stronger work ethic, appropriate social behavior, and a good attitude from their new workers, and only 5 percent said they needed better educated and skilled employees.

Educators on the task force, joined by state education officials and the then-former governor of North Carolina, James Hunt, asserted that the schools were not the cause of the problems the business leaders described. Rather, they argued, the poor discipline and motivation were due largely to inadequate and disinterested parents who fail to socialize their youngsters properly. One educator told the business leaders: "You are getting the lowest of the low; these children simply don't have the work ethic." A state education official charged that disadvantaged youngsters "are creating the chaos in our schools . . . and will eventually cost millions in social costs." The head of a local teachers' association alleged that it is "the lack of parental involvement that gives education all of its problems. . . . [These youngsters drop out] and diminish the quality of life for everyone . . . the family is the crux of the problem."

All the task force members eventually agreed that low-income parents are at the center of the poor discipline and motivation exhibited by students at school and later at work, linked the problem with poverty, and concurred that poverty is expanding locally and nationally. As is often the case in national reports about school reform (e.g., CED 1991), the task force attributed the rise in poverty to individual behaviors and life-styles: teenage mothers, single-parent families, illiteracy, and drug usage.

Noteworthy because of its absence

from the discourse of the task force was the possibility that the business community has played a role in the expansion of the aforementioned tendencies. Not one member linked the increasing rates of poverty or the lack of motivation and discipline among non-college-bound youths with the kinds of jobs that companies have eliminated and created over the past several years. Instead, members from all sectors of the local community repeated the popular nationwide claim that the new "high-tech, information-age" economy would supply numerous good jobs if only young people would stay in high school and graduate with "better" diplomas.

THE HIGH-TECH SOCIETY

In addition to the current accepted wisdom that U.S. schools must create better educated workers so corporations can compete effectively in global markets, many argue that such workers are necessary to match the rapidly growing number of new high-tech jobs (e.g., Cavazos 1989; Dole 1989; Doyle 1987; Shapiro and Walsh 1987). The alleged mismatch is asserted to be yet another reason for the weak competitive performance of U.S. firms. Variations of this theme flourish in the popular, business, and academic press. We heard versions of it several times during our case study, and they were repeated by the national policy analysts and educational reformers we interviewed in 1990.

The theme implies the widespread availability and expansion of sophisticated, complex jobs requiring a solid academic background. Mainstream social scientists, for instance, assert that "as technical sophistication and the complexity of tasks steadily increase, the educational requirements of the economy should expand" (Hage, Garnier, and Fuller 1988, p. 826). Critical social scientists added: "New attempts are needed to upgrade schools in ways that can better match jobs and potential employees . . . mass education fails to prepare [students] for life in the information age" (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1988, p. 24).

Although most business leaders, pol-

icy analysts, social scientists, and educators seem to accept that technological innovation is pervasive and usually requires new and more sophisticated skills from wage earners, there is no consensus on this issue. Rather, there is a heated academic debate over whether new workers are underskilled and undereducated and whether higher skill levels are necessary for current and future jobs. Bailey (1991) observed, however, that it is difficult and expensive to capture the characteristics of work and skills in large data sets.

The contrasting views in the debate fall roughly into two camps. The first camp claims that the work force is underskilled at the middle- and lower-level positions and that high-skill jobs are expanding (Bailey 1991). *Business Week* ("Help Wanted," 1987) reported, for example, that Motorola now has a production method that uses complex mathematical guides to manage quality. This work is currently done by engineers, but the company wants to "save money" by having blue-collar workers do part of it. Thus, the latter need "proved" math skills.

This kind of "upskilling," which attempts to save money by eliminating high-priced employees (the Babbage principal), will increase as a method of improving competitiveness, productivity, and profits (Attewell 1987; Kraut 1987). Although it has been argued that this trend may narrow the economic gap between some high- and low-wage employees (Kraut 1987), there is no evidence that it will open opportunity structures or raise wages for the lower-wage incumbents.

The second camp in the debate holds that the work force is overeducated, particularly at the middle and lower levels, and that emerging job opportunities will require less educated workers (Blackburn, Bloom, and Freeman 1991; Rumberger and Levin 1989). Spenner (1988; cf. Burke and Rumberger 1987) found little evidence to support the contention that many forms of technological change require more sophisticated education or workers. Moreover, some authors (Burke and Rumberger 1987; Ewen 1990) have suggested that the

proliferation of high-tech industries is more likely to reduce the skill requirements of jobs, rather than upgrade them.

In support of this thesis, among the business people surveyed for the report of the Commission on the Skills of the American Work Force (1990), just 5 percent said that educational and skill requirements are increasing in the workplace. Using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the report stated that approximately one-third of the jobs require an eighth-grade education, one-third require a tenth-grade education and some additional training, and one-third require four or more years of college (pp. 26–27).

Similarly, Reich (1991), eschewing the usual occupational categories, identified three major categories of jobs. The jobs in the first category, "routine production services," which include heavy industry but also many information-processing jobs were held by about one-quarter of the American work force in 1990. These workers' educational requirements are basic literacy and the ability to perform simple computations, but their "cardinal virtues are reliability, loyalty, and the capacity to take direction" (Reich 1991, p. 175). The second category, "in-person services," which accounted for 30 percent of the jobs in 1990, is growing the most rapidly. Its incumbents need "at most" a high school diploma and some vocational training. The third major category is "symbolic-analytic services," which require at least four years of college and accounted for 20 percent of the American jobs in 1990.

Predictions about the quantity of new high-tech jobs vary. The estimate of John Clendenin, chief executive officer of Bell South, is the most optimistic and reflects the pervasive belief in the opportunities of a postindustrial society: In the next few years "there will be 10 million information age jobs" (quoted in the "Business Roundtable Report," 1988, p. 1). A Bureau of Labor Statistics report (Fischer and Mandell 1988), however, showed that although 23.4 to 28.6 million new jobs will have been created between 1982 and 1995, only 1 million to 4.6 million will be in high-tech

industries, which is not the same as saying that they will be high-tech jobs.

Business Week ("Help Wanted," 1987) estimated that from 1986 to 2000 the largest number of new jobs (6,194,000) (in order) will be for retail salespersons, waitresses-waiters, nurses, janitors, general managers, cashiers, truck drivers, office clerks, food counter workers, and nurses' aides. The fastest-growing jobs from 1986 to 2000 will be as medical assistants, physical therapists, physical therapist aides, repairers of data-processing equipment, home health aides, systems analysts, medical records technicians, employment interviewers, and computer programmers. Yet they will account for only 1,112,000 new jobs ("Help Wanted," 1987; cf. Fischer and Mandell 1988).

Although some of these jobs require solid training beyond high school and some may be considered high tech, a far larger proportion do not fit these descriptions. Fiske (1988) pointed out, for instance, that the economy is generating nine new cashiering jobs for every computer programming job. Bailey (1991) noted that the usefulness of occupational forecasting for guiding educational reform is severely limited.

In general, business leaders' demands for a better-educated work force to match the high-tech information age do not take into account whether businesses really require such workers or how many they will actually need. Moreover, it does not follow that merely because a new technology is sophisticated, the education that workers need to interact with the technology must necessarily be more advanced. In other words, changes in skills may occur, but levels of skills may not increase (Rumberger 1989). Finally, contemporary upskilling (to the extent that it exists) is too often accompanied by decreased wages (Noyelle 1987).

CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING

Job Losses in the 1980s

Although technological innovation has captured the attention of educational reformers and analysts, other changes, especially changes in the labor market

wrought by corporate restructuring since the 1980s, have had more dramatic effects on non-college-bound youths. First, the industrial and entry-level jobs with core firms that non-college-bound students traditionally entered and in which they could expect a modicum of training, upward mobility, stability, and good annual wages—are disappearing rapidly (Harrison and Bluestone 1988; Lerman and Salzman 1987; Weis 1990). The 500 largest U.S. industrial companies added no jobs from 1975 to 1990, and their share of the civilian labor force dropped from 17 percent to 10 percent in that period (Reich 1991). Moreover, Fortune 500 companies eliminated 3.1 million jobs from 1980 to 1987 (Birch 1988). Other analysts have reported that almost 2 million manufacturing jobs were cut from 1979 to 1986 (Shapiro and Walsh 1987) and that 600,000 to 1.2 million middle- and upper-level executives lost their jobs from 1983 to 1986 (Newman 1989; Russell 1987). Overall, the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that from 1980 to 1985, 11 million workers lost their jobs through plant closings and massive layoffs (cited in Levitan and Shapiro 1987). Together these losses mean a diminished supply of jobs and rungs on job ladders in core firms.

Among the 11 million people who lost jobs, 55 percent experienced downward mobility (Newman 1989). Viewed through a different lens, in early 1986 of every 10 displaced workers, 3 found jobs in which they earned the same or more than previously, 3 found jobs where they earned less, and 4 were still unemployed (Katz 1989). As the jobless desperately took jobs beneath their skill and educational levels (Associated Press 1991), it appeared that the jobs into which they plummeted required the skills and credentials possessed by the downwardly mobile individuals. Thus, the credential-laden employees who are the displaced victims of corporate restructuring may have exacerbated the questionable demands for more solidly educated, highly trained workers in general.

A few analysts have suggested that even if all young people complete at least a community college program, there

will not be enough decent jobs awaiting them (Brint and Karabel 1989; Pincus 1989). On balance, however, most researchers, lay observers, and policymakers tend to emphasize the putatively weak and unsatisfactory workers who confront employers and neglect the kinds of jobs that confront new workers. They hesitate to investigate seriously, as we now try to do, the answer to the question suggested by an educator in the 1910s as he pondered business demands for better educated workers: "Here are our children; what kind of industry do you have to offer?" (quoted in Jacoby 1985, p. 84).

Corporate Destructuring

The broad and heavy emphasis on the pervasiveness of *technological* innovation both obscures and neglects the *social* innovation undertaken by corporate elites in the form of the externalization of work (sending work formerly done in the firm to outside contractors) and workers from core firms and the accompanying social and economic consequences. Although corporate restructuring seems to be organizational innovation involving the shifting, adjusting, "flexibilizing," and externalizing of functions or roles, these roles are occupied by people. Thus corporate restructuring must be understood as a social innovation. It is to this social innovation that we now turn.

Many of the new jobs created since 1980 are in the small-business sector of the economy, are easily constructed as contingent jobs, and feature short or nonexistent career ladders. Rather than corporate restructuring, we suggest that *destructuring* is a more appropriate term because organizational leaders frequently re-form their companies as much smaller, versions of their previous structures.

The massive growth of the small-business sector in the 1980s is partly the result of the externalization of work. The destructuring of core firms pushed jobs and therefore workers out of companies. Birch (1988), the premier analyst of the growth of small businesses, reported that 17 million new jobs were created from 1980 to 1987, mainly in non-

Fortune 500 companies, most of which were in the small-business sector or the competitive or peripheral labor market sector. Nasar (1990) noted more specifically that 15 million jobs were created in small businesses in the 1980s. In 1988, companies with fewer than 20 employees generated 35 percent of all new jobs in the United States even though such firms employ less than 19 percent of all workers (Associated Press 1988).

The small-business sector, which Birch (1988, p. 23) termed the "hidden economy," has absorbed "thousands of the victims of restructuring." "The hardships for those who must move and change careers, many times at a loss of pay is real and growing," Birch (p. 23) admitted. Small businesses are typically characterized by low wages, instability, or "volatility" and lack opportunities for training and upward mobility. Pfeffer and Baron (1988; cf. Birch 1988) added that these businesses provide few benefits and are likely to perish. Just as important, jobs in small businesses are frequently part time or temporary—contingent.

The Functions of Contingent Workers

Temporary and part-time workers have long been a part of the U.S. workplace, and their numbers usually increase during economic downturns and contract once the crisis passes. Following the 1981–82 recession, however, their numbers increased (Worsnip 1987). In 1985 Audrey Freeman, of the business advisory organization, the Conference Board, coined the phrase "contingent employment arrangements" (Polivka and Nardone 1989). Whether part-time temporary, part-time permanent, or full-time temporary, the key distinction between contingent workers and core workers is that contingent workers do not work full time (referring to hours per week) or year round (referring to weeks per year). Estimates of the number of individuals in "flexible" or contingent jobs vary widely. Probably the most accurate estimate is Belous's (1989) broad one: 28 to 35 percent of all workers in the United States.

A contingent work force is necessary, its advocates argue, to keep the economy

competitive (Worsnip 1987), and the increase in the number of these workers is frequently an aspect of corporate restructuring. Employers also use contingent workers as buffers against market fluctuations (Harrison and Bluestone 1988). Numerical and temporal flexibility fashion "just-in-time" workers who often labor for the numerous temporary-help services that have flourished since 1980 (Pfeffer and Baron 1988).

Contingent or "disposable" workers save employers the cost of benefits, pension plans, wages, and the expenses associated with internal job ladders. Moreover, these workers are vivid examples to core employees of the work life they may confront if they do not labor in a motivated, disciplined fashion (Littler and Salaman 1982). Contingent workers also give employers the kind of economic leeway that is necessary to continue to offer handsome benefits to the core employees whom they wish to retain and help insulate the former from layoffs (Osterman 1988). Finally, contingent work minimizes the possibilities of the formation and activism of unions because the workplace and work teams are constantly in a state of flux.

Citing hourly or weekly wages is no longer appropriate because neither of those temporal dimensions translate into annual income. Harrison and Bluestone (1988) pointed out that half the full-time year-round jobs created since 1980 pay less than \$11,000 a year and that 80 percent of the contingent workers earn less than that amount. Belous (cited in Davidson 1989) observed that 52 percent of the new jobs created since 1980 have been contingent. Taken together, these figures mean that 65 percent of the approximately 17 million new jobs created from 1980 to 1988 pay less than \$11,000 a year. The problem, especially for young workers, then, is not the loss of jobs per se, but the loss of wages (Ehrenreich 1989) because of the low wages and instability of the new jobs that are available. The enhanced flexibility for employers through restructuring and contingent work arrangements has

generated increased poverty for workers (Blank 1991; Moeller 1989).²

As has been noted, during the past several years the jobs to which non-college-bound youths have had access have undergone rapid and fundamental changes. Not only have millions of industrial jobs been replaced by low-mobility, low-paying jobs in the volatile small-business sector, but the expansion of contingent jobs in all sectors of the economy has contributed to destructured, unstable labor markets. The restructuring of companies has consequences, however, that the fashioners of restructuring did not foresee.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF RESTRUCTURED WORK

Former U.S. Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole (1989) argued that high school students must be taught to make the connection between staying in school and their future job possibilities and that there is a "motivation gap" among students. Dole and others, however, do not take into account the possibility that non-college-bound students *do* make the connection between a high school diploma and job opportunities and what they frequently observe fails to encourage them to be disciplined or motivated in school or at work.

Undisciplined, Unmotivated Students

Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) maintained that the constitution of the job market produces functional illiteracy to a large extent. Non-college-bound youths' perceptions of the opportunity structures that await them form the intersection of school failures and restructured work (Bishop 1989). Research (Bickel 1989; MacLeod 1987; Mickelson 1990) suggested that the perceptions of their occupational life chances shape the aca-

² Belous (cited in Kan 1989) observed that there are twice as many female and minority contingent workers as white male contingent workers. The effects of low wages, no benefits, and the lack of opportunity and how these factors intersect with schooling by race, ethnicity, and gender deserve analysis.

demic orientations and activities of adolescents from a wide variety of race and class backgrounds. Today, non-college-bound youths believe realistically that as adults, they will face jobs that are unstable; lack opportunities for advancement; pay low annual wages; and provide few, if any, health benefits.

These students' observations of the wages they will receive are correct. The annual earnings of high school graduates aged 20–24 fell from \$15,221 to \$10,924 from 1973 to 1986 (William T. Grant Foundation 1988b) and those of 30-year-old high school graduates fell by 30 percent to \$17,300 from 1973 to 1985 (Shapiro and Walsh 1987). Decreasing and uncertain wages are a signal to youths that the business community does not value a high school diploma. Adolescents tend to assign as little value to the kinds of jobs available with a high school diploma as does the rest of society (Borman 1991; Liebow 1967; Ogbu 1988; Wilson 1988), and new workers view the available jobs as both menial and meaningless (Duster 1987).

Thus, numerous indicators suggest that both schooling and markets have lost their credibility as fair mechanisms for distributing opportunities (Shapiro 1990). Non-college-bound high school students, although repeatedly taught that the key to good jobs and upward mobility is to do well in high school, are increasingly unable to see—in the world around them—success stories in the lives of their neighbors, peers, and kin who are high school graduates (MacLeod 1987; Mickelson 1990; Shanker 1990; William T. Grant Foundation 1988a).

One result is that both the low-income white youths whom MacLeod (1987) studied and the offspring of downwardly mobile corporate managers whom Newman (1989) interviewed resisted the “achievement ideology” or “meritocratic individualism” because to embrace it meant that they would have to think of their parents as stupid and lazy (MacLeod 1987) or weak and unambitious (Newman 1989). Thus, the dearth of secure jobs with decent pay, stability, and opportunities partially debunks the ideology and rhetoric that education

will lead to good jobs (Mickelson 1990; Willis 1977).

The target population that most adults would like to remain in school and perform well is least likely to do so because its members do not believe a high school education will lead to decent jobs or opportunities or think that the available jobs are too low paying and unstable to make diligent educational efforts worthwhile (cf. Berman 1989). This, however, is just the first contradiction fostered by corporate restructuring.

Undisciplined, Unmotivated Workers

The social restructuring and destructuring of firms has created new social arrangements in the workplace. These new arrangements have generated unanticipated consequences for corporate leaders. The relationship between volatile, undisciplined labor markets and undisciplined workers deserves analysis.

The tendency to bring formerly independent contractors inside companies increased dramatically around 1900, so that employers might exercise more control over them (Edwards 1979; Kanter 1977). Similarly, during the 1910s proper training in school was believed to furnish the “life-career motive” (Jacoby 1985) that would foster both discipline and motivation. In the 1990s, however, such a motive is absent for many. Corporate leaders have largely abandoned career ladders, a crucial aspect of what Edwards (1979) termed bureaucratic control or what Kanter (1977) called opportunity structures, and replaced them with contingent employment relationships. The social and emotional distancing of workers (Magnum, Mayall, and Nelson 1985), however, also distances them from job security, career ladders, and cash-in-kind benefits and thus eliminates the key sources of motivation and discipline for workers that have been common since World War II (Baron, Dobbin, and Jennings 1986; Edwards 1979).

Elaborate incentives and intense socialization into a corporation's culture are used to integrate employees emotionally and socially into “the company,” but destructuring generates the opposite ten-

dency—social disintegration. The potential contradiction, then, is that the benefits that a corporate culture may possess as a disciplinary and motivational technique are potentially nullified by corporate restructuring activities. Put another way, the extent to which instability, volatility, and uncertainty are built into organizational design is the extent to which both orderly cooperation and passionate effort are less possible and anomie is far more possible.

Applebaum (cited in Worsnip 1987) observed that for business leaders, flexibility now takes precedence over loyalty and low turnover. The turnover of employees that so plagued and troubled organizational elites during the 1910s is purposefully a part of organizational strategy and design today. But, as was noticed in the earlier period (Douglas 1918; Hotchkiss 1923), the lack of stable work groups and cooperative efforts was also observed in 1990 (Block 1990) because turnover at any level in the firm threatens orderly cooperation.

Under the new restructured conditions, the discipline and motivation of contingent workers are hindered in other ways as well. Business writers, for example, have noted that motivation, productivity, and quality of output are problems among the "flexforce" (Verespej 1989), or "associate members" (Lodge and Walton 1989) in companies because contingent workers have little understanding of the firm or its goals (Hayes 1989; Verespej 1989). Moreover, short-term employees are not interested in the long-term goals of the organization's leaders (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 1986). The unstable nature of the jobs further adversely affects the productivity of contingent workers (Koretz 1989), whose affiliation is weak (Belous 1989) and who may labor with less-than-passionate effort. Pfeffer and Baron (1988) argued that markets will discipline contingent workers, but did not suggest that workers may simply choose to opt out motivationally, if not physically.³

Consequences also occur throughout the firm. Core employees, for instance, have little incentive to share their knowledge and skills with temporary workers for fear of undermining their own job security (Block 1990); such withholding harms productivity. Loyalty, indeed, decreases at all levels (G. Graham 1990; Joyner 1988) as core employees become increasingly anxious about the stability of their jobs. The passion and commitment that presumably creates greater productivity diminishes (Donnelly 1988).

The externalization of workers means that employers purchase cheap, flexible labor power (whose bearers earn flexible wages), but the typical ways to discipline or control contingent workers disappear. Pollert (1988, p. 301) correctly wrote that "a further expansion of an insecure, casual, poorly trained and cheap employment periphery is the last thing needed to increase productivity." If contingent work causes contradictions for business owners, the consequences for young workers are more troubling.

Effects on Youths of Unstable Jobs

An advocate of contingent work praised the new "dynamic economy propelled by workers who haven't put down roots" (Barrier 1989, p. 34). Years of rootlessness, however, take their toll on young workers. Shanker (1990), president of the American Federation of Teachers expressed his dismay that even high school graduates who did well in their studies usually cannot hope to obtain a good stable job until they are at least in their mid-20s. These several years of floundering in unstable jobs, punctuated by periods of unemployment, lead to the

laboring on the premises, but only 1,800 working for the firm; the rest are temporary, leased, or subcontracted workers. This company is an example of a "flexible firm" in which the ratio of core employees to the total work force is low (Sloane 1989). One informant, a temporary worker at the firm, reported that her supervisor refused her request for a week off to complete her master's thesis. When she replied that she would quit because she only had a few weeks left on her contract, the supervisor granted her request.

³ Several informants told us that a production facility of a Fortune 100 company in the Charlotte, NC, area has 5,000 employees

loss of self-confidence, to cynicism, and often despair (William T. Grant Foundation 1988a) and to a chronic sense of insecurity (Koretz 1989) for the approximately one-half of U.S. high school graduates who do not attend college. Moreover, the inability to obtain steady work tends to make the young entrants less attractive and even "tainted" to potential employers and may lead to their being permanently marginalized (McFate 1991).

Unstable jobs, volatile labor markets, and uncertain and low wages may shape orientations and traits that redound back onto the performance of tasks and appear as a lack of motivation and discipline (see Atwell, 1984, for a review of the debate on whether unsatisfactory workers end up in bad jobs or bad jobs foster unsatisfactory work habits). Another contradiction of the new "casualization" of labor (Moeller 1989), then, may well be attitudinal, intellectual, and often physical disengagement from school and young workers' disinterest in available jobs.

DISCUSSION

Non-college-bound youths must be viewed as active agents in their social processes; they experience and make sense of their worlds. High school students, as Shor put (1986) it, read reality with more care than they read textbooks. Part of their world is the realm of work, not only because many high school students hold jobs and observe high school graduates in those jobs, but because they observe their adult kin grappling with the financial difficulties fostered by restructuring and the decreased wages of many kinds of jobs. Work is rarely considered an agent of socialization or in the same category as family, education, religion, or the mass media. Yet the fundamental and rapid transformations of work opportunities are clearly a part of the socialization process of adolescents.

We contend that the current "education deficit" (Cavazos 1989), and "motivation gap" (Dole 1989) emanate from sources beyond putatively unsatisfactory public schools or allegedly inade-

quate parents. The emphasis on presumably weak, often low-income families (Jeanne Allen, Heritage Foundation, interview, March 9, 1990; Glazer 1990; Schneider 1990; Wynne 1990) or allegedly weak schools—both formulated as faulty socialization—fails to explain adequately the deficits in motivation and discipline of U.S. high school students and new workers who do not go to college.

We have tried to show that other sources, slimmed-down companies, for example, have significant effects on educational motivation and discipline by increasingly polarizing the economy (Aronowitz and Giroux 1985), thereby decreasing annual wages and the rewards of a high school diploma (Bishop 1989). The current economic crisis (following Aronowitz and Giroux 1985) was not caused by education, but has had significant effects on the educational processes and outcomes of non-college-bound students. Therefore, we propose the following alternative to the usual formulations of the problems with U.S. public schools: A lack of economic opportunities for non-college-bound youngsters shapes their performance in high school; fosters their early school leaving; and is associated with a host of related tendencies, including weak discipline and motivation both at school and at work.

CONCLUSION

In the past several years, business leaders restructured their firms to enhance their ability to compete internationally. The social and economic consequences to workers of restructured work and jobs may have unintentionally fostered or exacerbated the so-called education crisis, characterized by youths who do not perform as disciplined and motivated students and employees. That is, business leaders' solution to a perceived economic crisis has promoted a crisis of social integration. Put another way, the corporate community's accumulation strategy of marginalizing and externalizing work and workers undermines and impairs a necessary condition of production—disciplined and motivated labor

power—and the successful reproduction of it.

In this article we have sought to link the current school reform movement to restructured labor markets and their consequences for high school students and new workers. We are not convinced, however, that corporate leaders' demands for reform are simply attempts to scapegoat the schools. It is not clear, for example, that the top officers of major corporations are aware of the dearth of promising entry-level jobs. Frederick Edelstein, of the National Alliance of Business, told us in an interview on March 7, 1990, that "CEOs need to be educated" about the realities of labor markets for youths. Similarly, Harold Howe II, former U.S. commissioner of education, reported in an interview on April 18, 1990, that he has "been going around [the country] rattling cages" to encourage the business community to create better jobs.

The business community, however, typically does not examine its own policies and activities as possible sources of the crisis. Instead, corporate restructuring is praised as successful, and it has become one model for contemporary school reform efforts. But corporate restructuring has generated further chaos and uncertainty in the economy and in society and implies instability and insecurity. Shor (1986) speculated that educators may face the task of adjusting future labor to long-term uncertainty. Will school reforms, then, reflect the volatility and increasing polarization of the U.S. economy? If so, what are the probable effects on public education in a democratic society?

Whatever policies are implemented, school reforms of any kind are unlikely to succeed if non-college-bound students cannot anticipate opportunity structures that reward diligent efforts in school. Employers are not apt to find highly disciplined and motivated young employees for jobs that are unstable and low paying. Solely restructuring schools and students without attending to the contradictions generated by a restructured crisis-prone economy are unlikely to solve U.S. business leaders' problems with global competitiveness.

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