



Exemplary Schools and the Search for Effectiveness

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traditional education due to a number of new studies (Coleman, 1966; Jencks, 1972; Plowden, 1967; Husen, 1967). One example is the Coleman Report, a vital document in the annals of educational research.

What Makes a Difference?

The Department of Justice initiated this survey apparently so that they could document willful discrimination in education. This is one of the few examples in our country's history of a specific request made by Congress for social research that might provide a basis for policy. The Office of Education asked James S. Coleman of Johns Hopkins University and Ernest Q. Campbell of Vanderbilt University to direct the \$1.5 million project.

These were its main conclusions:

1. Family background is important for achievement.
2. The relationship of family background to achievement does not diminish over years of schooling.
3. Variations in school facilities, curriculum, and staff have little effect on achievement independent of family background.
4. School factors that have the greatest influence (independent of family background) are the teacher's characteristics, not the facilities and curriculum.

Studying the characteristics of schools with unexpectedly high test scores may yield clues to what makes them effective.

Until the mid-1960s, educators were confident they were capable of teaching children from all backgrounds, given adequate resources. This confidence was shared by the public, as evidenced by the widespread support given to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). However, in the past decade, people have begun questioning the values of

5. Attitudes, such as sense of control of the environment or a belief in the responsiveness of the environment, were found to be highly related to achievement . . . (Mayeske, 1973).

Coleman is *not* saying schools don't make a difference. His report indicates that if you compare children who have had no schooling with those who have had schooling, schooling has a *great* and important effect at all socioeconomic levels. His writing indicates that when you look for differences in the effect of schooling between schools, it is difficult to identify school-related variables that account for the observed differences. This is different from saying schooling has no effect. The only place where school versus no school achievement has been studied is in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in 1959, when the county closed its public school system to avoid the Supreme Court's racial desegregation decree. In that situation, all children who went to volunteer schools learned a great deal more than children who did not attend school (Green, 1964).

The findings of the Coleman Report were supported by the results of many early evaluations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—Tempo (General Electric, 1968); Technomics, Inc., (1968); Scientific Educational Systems (1970); Kirst (1967); Ginsberg (1970); Evans (1969); Hanushek (1972); McLaughlin (1975).

After a careful review of the extensive research on educational effectiveness, the Rand Corporation in a report to the President's Commission on School Finance concluded, "Research has not identified a variant of the existing system that is consistently related to students' educational outcomes." The report continues, "We must emphasize that we are not suggesting that nothing makes a difference, or that nothing 'works.' Rather we are saying that research has found nothing that consistently and unambiguously makes a difference in students' outcomes." This exhaustive review of the research and evaluation literature also stated that ". . . in every type of school the principal appears to be essential to making the school operate effectively, but also shows that a principal's effectiveness depends in part on the amount of support he or she receives from higher administrative levels" (Averch, 1971).

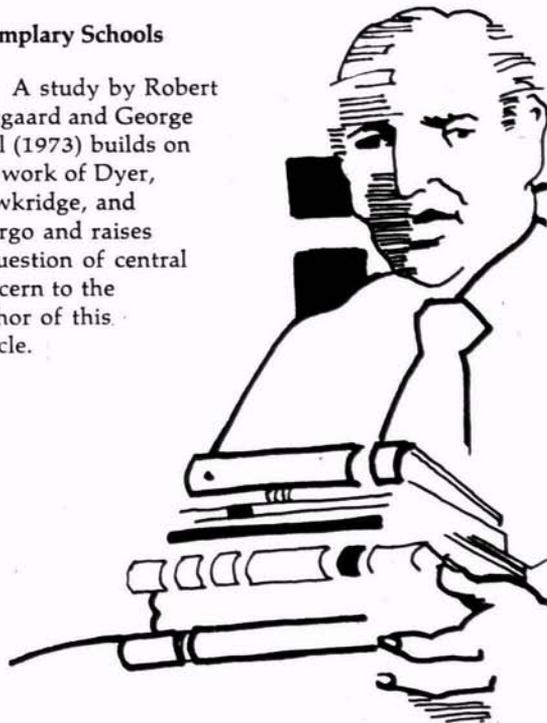
Variables Outside the School

During this time, other researchers were taking a different approach. They tended to accept that many programs had not lived up to their expectations, but they were more interested in identifying those exemplary schools that met their goals. Henry Dyer (1972) proposed a general model that takes into considera-

tion the variables that cannot be manipulated by the schools. The Dyer model involved predicting student performance from hard-to-change surrounding conditions and student input performance. The hard-to-change surrounding conditions included student, home, and community characteristics that were related to achievement and were not under the direct control of the school. The input variable was a measure of the students' performance at the beginning phase of schooling which was to be evaluated. The most common method of implementing the general model is regression analysis using mean values of the predictor variable to predict mean output achievement. For example, to examine the effectiveness of teaching reading in grade six to grade nine, the sixth-grade reading achievement mean and mean values of demographic variables could be used to predict the mean score for ninth-grade reading achievement. The discrepancy between a school's predicted performance and the actual performance is interpreted as a measure of its relative effectiveness for the time period studied. Schools are usually classified into effectiveness categories based upon the size of the discrepancy between observed and predicted scores. Hawkrige (1968, 1969) identified a number of ESEA programs that worked. The U.S. Office of Education published descriptions of those programs in pamphlet form under the title, *The "It Works" Series*. Wargo (1971) continued Hawkrige's work.

Exemplary Schools

A study by Robert Klitgaard and George Hall (1973) builds on the work of Dyer, Hawkrige, and Wargo and raises a question of central concern to the author of this article.



"Perhaps educational research has looked in the wrong places for evidence of effectiveness. Previous studies have indicated that, on average, school policies do not greatly affect measurable student scholastic and occupational performance. Suppose this is true. Might there remain, nevertheless, a group of schools that are different? Are there any exceptions to small average tendencies and insignificant regression coefficients? The mathematics of previous studies allow for such a possibility, as long as the number of exceptions is not large" (Klitgaard and Hall, 1973).

Klitgaard and Hall examined six data sets for outliers: Michigan schools; New York City elementary schools; Project Talent data; New York State school districts; New York State schools; and Project Yardstick data. They identified groups of overachieving schools that made up between two and nine percent of various samples. From a policy standpoint they characterized these schools as being "statistically 'unusual,'" but whether they can be considered unusually effective depends on one's subjective scale of magnitude. They conclude:

"Nonetheless, moving away from average effects in educational research and policy making does seem worthwhile. We have located schools and districts that consistently perform better than their peers. It is probably worthwhile to continue such research, and to begin looking for unusually effective classrooms and programs" (Klitgaard and Hall (1973).

Following the ideas advanced by Klitgaard, a number of states have designed and completed studies of outlier or exemplary schools. Four states—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland—have completed longitudinal or case studies of exceptional schools.

The major finding of these studies is that there is no one single factor that accounts for a school being classified as exceptional. These schools appear to have a critical mass of positive factors which, when put together, make the difference. All of these factors were not found in each school in the studies but are characteristic of the group as a whole.

- Strong principal leadership (for example, schools "being run" for a purpose rather than "running" from force of habit);

- Strong principal participation in the classroom instructional program and in actual teaching;

- Higher expectations on the part of the principal for student and teacher performance advancement;

- Principals felt that they had more control over the functioning of the school, the curriculum and program, and their staff;

- Greater experience and more pertinent education in the roles of principals, teachers, and teacher aides;

- Teachers were rated as warmer, more responsive, and showing more emphasis on cognitive development in classes that did not involve direct reading instruction as well as in reading classes;

- Teachers expected more children to graduate from high school, to go to college, to become good readers, and to become good citizens;

- Teachers were more satisfied with opportunities to try new things; they were free to choose teaching techniques in response to individual pupil needs;

- More satisfactory parent-teacher relationships;

- Job responsibilities for the teacher aides included working across all grades with primarily small, low-ability groups; close involvement of teachers and paraprofessionals with pupils;

- On several measures, differences seemed to be more pronounced in grades one to three than in grades four to six;

- Schools had a longer instruction day;

- In evaluation, the teachers relied almost completely on teacher-developed tests and teacher judgments of student achievement;

- More positive self-concept and a feeling of controlling their own destiny observable as early as grade three on part of children.

The Principal and Leadership

These characteristics show that school characteristics are related to mean school achievement. Also, a school that performs in unusually successful ways has a principal or a leader who is an exceptional person. Recent research by Guditis and Zirkel (1979) indicates that this kind of leadership comes to a principal as a result of what is called expert power as compared with legitimate power, coercive power, referent power, or reward power. The principals in these studies were viewed by the teachers and the pupils as persons who are expert in a wide variety of areas concerning education. In these studies, the principal is identified as an expert instructional leader, instead of an administrative leader, and the level of instructional expertise falls in the area of reading or arithmetic. The second characteristic that emerged from these studies is that the levels of expectations for the children held by the principals and teachers were unusually high, and the children tended to rise to these expectations in their performance levels. We also find, in agreement with Brookover (1978), that the major reasons why a school is identified as performing above expectation or below are most pronounced in the early grades of the school. This is perhaps because their instructional day is longer, and more of the day, particularly in the early

grades, is spent on student-oriented instruction in the area of reading and mathematics.

This research does not, however, demonstrate how these school characteristics develop in the school. The atypical school demonstrates that a favorable climate can exist in low-SES as well as high-SES or minority schools, but the process by which the climate and associated higher achievement came to exist is not documented by this research.

Smith and Tucker (1977) say "that a decade of research and evaluation has taught us that the effectiveness of educational treatments, programs, or technologies varies greatly from one school to the next. No one curriculum or instructional practice has been found to be consistently superior to others over time in a variety of different settings." We continue to believe, however, that local schools do make a difference. The individual characteristics of principals, teachers, schools, neighborhoods, and home influence a pupil's achievement far more than particular instructional models. Thus, research confirms the faith of those who believe that no improvement in the quality of schooling is likely unless the people in individual schools, in concert with the parents and children they serve, agree on what they want to accomplish. They then must be given the freedom to orchestrate resources to accomplish it. The school climate must provide stimulating ideas and facilitate the exchange of ideas with colleagues. Teachers must have the opportunity to work together over time to achieve common objectives, and—not least important—have the sense that they are sufficiently free of administrative intervention that it is worth investing time and energy in the effort to improve the education offered in their school. When the teachers and other school personnel feel successful about education in their school, children also believe they can achieve and they do.

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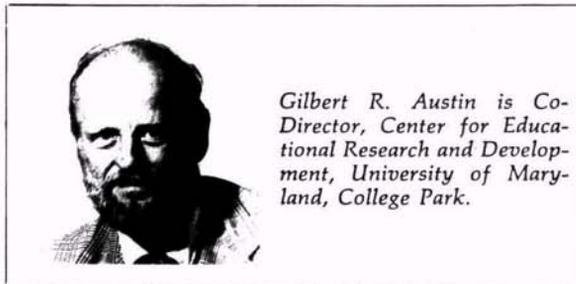
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