

Unrealistic and Unfair

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If anyone knows in depth what is really happening in a large number of schools, Goodlad surely does. In his article he objectively describes actual curricular and instructional practices in the schools contrasted to idealized, rhetorical, publicly espoused educational goals. Because of the power of Goodlad's data base, his description of schooling is probably accurate. To many educators, the discouraging picture will be offensive and probably unacceptable. Throughout the paper Goodlad espouses uncompromisingly idealized goals as standards of judgment for schools. He ignores the relevance of the environmental context and schools' accomplishments in educating large diverse populations. These omissions are unfortunate oversights.

The goals developed by states represent the lofty aspirations that all of us hold for our children's education. We all want the schools to help youngsters reach their highest potential in all the dimensions society outlines in these goals. However, only in the most extraordinary circumstances is attainment of such goals possible, and the rigid application of accomplishment of these goals as standards for schools without reference to context is unrealistic and unfair. The basic issue is not the *absolute* standards that schools reach but how far the schools move the students toward the achievement of high but reachable goals.

The most promising and relevant work on changing and improving schools is the school and teaching effectiveness research exemplified by Austin (1979), Brookover and Lezotte (1977), Edmonds (1979), and Purkey and Smith (1982). These studies have identified the major factors associated with effective schools—instructional leadership of principal (or other significant person), clear objectives, high expectation levels for students, high academic time-on-task, staff development supporting and

improving classroom instruction, and community involvement. Widely different research teams using different samples and different instruments have yielded similar results. The factors identified with effective schools suggest clues for general school improvement.

Although Goodlad rejects teaching method as significant for school improvement, recent studies on teaching effectiveness strongly suggest that effective teaching strategies can be taught and that good instruction does make a difference. This approach requires more than teachers learning new skills. It also requires the mastery of new intellectual understanding and complexity. And beyond this is the need for "cultural" changes in the school—norms, values, and organizational changes to support the new instructional practices and procedures. The factors associated with school effectiveness are interdependent and, for successful implementation, must be changed simultaneously, mutually supporting each other. (There are also instructional paradigms and models of schooling that address a broad range of educational goals. See Joyce and Weil, 1980).

Some local schools reach many of the idealized goals that Goodlad has identified. These schools have supportive communities, interested parents, capable students, and strong instructional leadership and practice. They are creating schools characterized by intellectual curiosity, challenging and innovative pursuits, high achievement, and individual creativity. One can feel the ambience immediately on these campuses.

On the other hand we have schools with populations similar to those addressed by the inscription on the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe. . . ." Immigrant youngsters, ghetto youth, migrant children, and other disadvantaged youth populate many schools. Teachers cope with the problems of reaching these youngsters, all too often in large classes with inadequate resources. Yet despite these unfortunate circumstances, a few schools with effective leadership and competent, well-trained staff are elevating test scores above what reasonably could be expected. Considering the diversity of needs and goals and the lack of public support, the attainments of these schools are all the more striking.

Can schools be changed for the better? I think we have the knowledge to do so but we must develop the will. Like

Goodlad, I am awed at the enormity of the task and the leadership required, but efforts are being made toward improving education for the nation's youth.

In an effort to apply the findings of the school effectiveness research, the Santa Clara County Office of Education has instituted intensive training in classroom management to increase academic time-on-task and in instructional strategies to improve the quality of instruction. To ensure that teachers have the support and follow-up necessary to implement successfully in their classes what they have learned in the training, we have hired "teacher advisors," exemplary classroom teachers who are freed from teaching responsibilities part-time to provide on-site classroom support and follow-up to teachers who have gone through the training.

In cooperation with the Milpitas Unified School District, we also are developing a School Effectiveness Program that will produce school "profiles" covering the factors related to school effectiveness. These profiles will be compared to results from identified effective schools to show schools which areas need improvement. To complement these efforts, we need to develop principal and superintendent institutes so that administrators can gain the skills and knowledge to support changes in school norms, organizational structures, and instructional methodology. With good luck and funding support, I hope the institutes can be established within a year. Obviously at this point we do not have longitudinal data to evaluate our work, nor do we have all the design elements in place. But I believe our work will be fruitful. □

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References

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