

# A Painful Picture

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Goodlad paints a picture that is painful to look at: students spending most of their time listening to teacher lectures, learning facts rather than using higher level thinking skills. Drab teachers in drab school facilities, teaching goals substantially different from those in curriculum documents.

Anger and denial are reasonable initial responses to the picture. Our rose-colored glasses help us see the positive aspects of our schools. Understanding and improving the conditions he describes will require a commitment to the effort. We can do it. We must do it.

The discrepancy between our idealistic expectations for students and actual classroom practice is particularly troublesome. An old adage admonishes us to study this issue as, "It's impossible to take intelligent action to get someplace unless you know where you're going." Goodlad's observations and educational research offer some insight about what we might do.

It's possible that the discrepancy is value-based. The Goodlad article gives little insight into the values of the principals and teachers in the study. We know from research that there is a high correlation between effective schools and effective principals, and from our own teaching experiences that teachers teach what they believe to be important. It seems evident then that the views of those affected by curriculum decisions need to be given priority attention. Top-down directives are of limited effectiveness.

Our district addresses the values issue in two ways. We conduct a thorough study of each curriculum area at least once every seven years. The study model is designed to ensure that the views of

principals and teachers are sought and used as decisions are made. Our design also provides that the assumptions and rationale for the decisions be stated.

If, as Goodlad suggests, teachers teach to those goals for which they are reinforced, then it's equally as important for us to know the views of the community. Our district sought community reaction to our student goals about ten years ago. Since that time, changes in information processing, technology, and the economy, as well as those related to social attitudes, have occurred. If consensus about goals serves to reinforce and to motivate more than do guilt feelings based on the perception that there is no consensus, then we need a current validation of our goals.

With Goodlad, we must be concerned that the more idealistic goals such as thinking rationally and creatively, understanding others with differing value systems, and interacting in cooperative, caring, and trusting ways receive so little attention. But teaching for the attainment of these goals is a tough job, particularly when teachers have seldom seen these things modeled in their own experiences as students.

We believe that our district's staff development offerings provide teachers with the support needed to do these things. We are currently offering on a voluntary basis a number of courses such as the Hunter teaching model, Johnson and Johnson's strategies for cooperative classroom, and the Pride/In-

terchange approach.

However, we acknowledge that we do not collect objective, systematic information about the extent to which these valuable approaches are used in the classroom. And we probably err by providing these offerings on an "after school" basis. Our rose-colored glasses impressions may need to be verified. We may need to put our resources where our expectations are.

It is easy to read Goodlad as if he is describing "other" schools. But if there is a possibility that he is accurate or even partially accurate about our own school, then we must take action. The following seems minimal:

1. Get a current reading from the community, staff, and students about expectations for students.
2. Examine our school to get objective information about the extent to which the conditions Goodlad describes actually prevail.
3. Make plans to allocate resources for the needed improvements. In doing this, explore ways to involve state and local agencies as well as regional and national resources. Pay attention to recent research about the change process in educational institutions in making plans.
4. Design an on-going objective evaluation to check progress and to help lead us from hypocrisy and naivete to effective schools.

In short, we can do better; we must take action to do better. In the relatively short history of American education, the school has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to respond. This is a new challenge. We are sufficiently competent to meet the challenge. □

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