

What About Successes?

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John Goodlad's article reminds me of Charles Silberman's *Crisis in the Classroom*. While Goodlad's research is more systematic and his tone considerably more polite—remember Silberman's accusation of "mindlessness"?—he also finds that the quality of instruction and of school life fall short of our great expectations.

Goodlad's case is persuasive, although I question the over-representation of high schools in his sample (52 percent). Still, it is far easier to understand what does not work than to document what does work.

A useful example of what can happen in a school with a supportive "ambiance" and an opportunity for dialogue is a recent project in our junior high. Responding to teachers' desires to break out of a conventional schedule of grade-level, subject matter classes and unite the school in a common topic, we developed a three-day study of the 1940s. The project's success is nicely captured by a seventh grade student:

I enjoyed . . . studying the 1940s because it gave me a chance to work with students that I had never worked with before. Those three days gave me chances to express my ideas on controversial issues where there was no right or wrong answer such as the decision to drop the Atomic Bomb on Japan, to learn what others thought about my personal feelings, and what their opinions were. . . .

Researchers committed to improving schools should focus their attention on understanding how programs such as this can be introduced and replicated within schools. While it is worthwhile hearing, for example, that there is little

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in Goodlad's data to suggest "the possibility of developing productive and satisfying relations . . . based on respect, trust, cooperation, and caring," or "anything to suggest the deliberate involvement of students in making moral judgments and in understanding the difference between these and decisions based on scientific facts," it would be far more useful to read careful, analytic descriptions of models where these qualities *are* present.

In the 13 years since Silberman jolted us—indeed, inspired many of us to enter the profession—there have been significant advancements in the quality of instruction and life in individual classrooms and schools. If these advancements are to be replicated they also need to be understood. In short, I challenge John Goodlad to follow his own advice: if the measure of success one has in improving schools depends heavily on understanding them, let's direct our attention to understanding our successes. □

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