

# Exceedingly "Effective" Schools

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The December 1982 Issue of *Educational Leadership* featured 15 articles on the theme, "Toward More Effective Schools." There is no need for me to repeat either the goals or the stated and implied teaching methods of this increasingly pervasive movement. They are well known to all readers of *Educational Leadership*.

At the same time that the effective schools movement was picking up a full head of steam, John Goodlad and his associates were putting the finishing touches on their massive, "A Study of Schooling." Goodlad's study is essentially descriptive, not prescriptive (in contrast to the effective schools literature). It offers no master plan, no "five steps to better schools," no formulas, no doctrine. What it provides is an unsettling look at the reality of life in a number of American public schools. And what is the nature of that reality?

First, "A Study of Schooling" reveals that both parents and professionals profess to believe that schools ought to be concerned with a wide range of goals—not merely with narrow, 3 R's based academic achievement. Educational goal statements consistently include goals such as the development of a love of learning, the ability to use and evaluate knowledge and to solve problems, the development of aesthetic tastes and concerns, the development of qualities such as curiosity and creativity, learning for the sake of learning, the effective use of leisure time, the development of satisfactory relations with others, which implies respect, trust, cooperation, caring, and the understanding of differing value systems.

Second, "A Study of Schooling" reveals that, despite this wide array of stated goals, the schools studied are and have been emphasizing a narrow, aca-

demically curriculum while largely ignoring broader goals. In addition, the teaching practices used by the vast majority of teachers in the schools studied bear a striking resemblance to those suggested or implied by effective schools research.

This creates an interesting paradox. If Goodlad is right, American schools claim to educate broadly, but in practice emphasize a narrow, 3 R's based curriculum, taught to large groups in a relatively standardized way, with textbooks, workbooks, dittoed sheets, and teacher-dominated talk as the prime teaching techniques.

On the other hand, effective schools advocates have more modest goals; that is, the improvement of test scores in reading and math for what Robert Coles refers to as the "children of the poor." They suggest large-group instruction, "highly structured" teaching, uniform curricula and standards. If my reading of "A Study of Schooling" is correct, American schools ought to be exceedingly "effective" since they have been practicing the procedures suggested by the effective schools movement for years. One wonders whether or not an increased emphasis on such curricular and methodological narrowness will in the long run achieve even the limited goals effective schools advocates seek. In fact, an analysis of what research suggests about the teaching of 3 R's which I published in a recent *Phi Delta Kappan* symposium (December 1982, pp. 236-

247), suggests that it is the narrowness (I called it trivialization) of our treatment of these subjects that leads to poor performance.

Henry Steele Commager once wrote of an enormous gap between the ideal and reality in the quality of American life in general. In a narrower sense this phenomenon seems to be occurring in American education as well. Goodlad calls it "a monstrous hypocrisy." This may be too strong a statement. There is almost something sad, something wistful, about our refusal to abandon broader, more idealistic goals for our schools and for our children. It's as if we know in our heart of hearts that these things are right and good, and that we ought to be concerned about them. Yet we have enormous difficulty reconciling these goals with the pressure for high test performance in certain aspects of the curriculum.

To their credit, those advocating effective schools have not engaged in this "hypocrisy," if that is indeed what it is. Their goals are, as I wrote earlier, modest by comparison. Yet one must ask, if the concern for broader goals is as pervasive as it is revealed to be in "A Study of Schooling," if many Americans, in the long run, really do expect some of these goals to be met, what will be the effect of the educational programs described in the December *Educational Leadership*? Will they contribute minimally to such goals, have a neutral effect, or perhaps have a negative impact? More important, will anyone care?

Unfortunately, "A Study of Schooling" settles none of this. Its data are disquieting, unsettling. It suggests a beginning rather than an ending, a call for reexamination of educational purposes and processes. □

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