

Recommendations and Realities

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Those who speak and write about needed changes in schools are seldom practicing teachers or administrators. They are politicians, journalists, university presidents, researchers, or—like me—former practitioners now several steps removed from the classroom. That doesn't necessarily mean that our ideas are wrong or our prescriptions naive. Sometimes outsiders are better at detecting problems or finding solutions than those immersed in the details of a particular situation.

John Goodlad, Ernest Boyer, and TheodoreSizer, for example, are surely not uninformed. They are experienced educators, and they base their pronouncements on mounds of data freshly collected in on-site visits to U.S. schools. But are their recommendations realistic? Is it reasonable for Boyer to advocate flexible scheduling¹ and a teaching load of four classes?² Is it practical for Goodlad to demand that tracking be abandoned,³ and to expect activity and excitement in place of the passivity and boredom he sees now?⁴ Does Sizer really expect school boards to dismantle bureaucratic hierarchies and delegate "substantial authority" to individual teachers?⁵

Few professions have such huge disparities between what their leading authorities advocate and what practitioners actually do. Reflecting some confusion about what to believe, many teachers and principals say they agree with statements about the importance of student participation, independent thought, and so on, but they also express agreement with *contradictory* statements.⁶ Meanwhile in their daily conduct they often ignore the more progressive principles, assumedly because such things are unworkable in the "real world."

Having taught and been a principal in several very real junior and senior highs, I understand. Aspiring to ideals beyond our grasp is not hypocritical. But if we sense too much of a discrepancy between our beliefs and our behavior, we may feel guilty or become cynical.

These remarks apply to an exchange in this issue over the practicality of a



process that most authorities consider central to instructional supervision. Shirley McFaul and James Cooper report the apparent failure of their attempt to get teachers in an urban school to provide clinical supervision to one another. Moreover, they contend that it is probably unrealistic to expect peer clinical supervision to succeed in other schools where conditions are similar. Two professors of supervision respond that the experiment failed—if it *did* fail—not because the process was too idealistic, but because the project was badly designed.

Professional debate on this and other such issues is useful because it may help improve communication between those who operate schools and those who would like to see them operated differently. □

Ron Brandt

¹Ernest L. Boyer, *High School* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 232.

²Boyer, p. 159.

³John Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), p. 297.

⁴Goodlad, p. 244.

⁵Theodore R. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 195.

⁶Goodlad, p. 174.

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