Overview

Time to Re-Form Schools

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A n ASCD policy analysis group has issued a report (p. 17) indirectly critical of many current education reforms. The group of scholars and practitioners selected for their acquaintance with current reform issues said that even the sponsors of a given policy may not be fully aware of the assumptions on which it is based, and may have little evidence that it will accomplish its intended purpose.

A lot of educators are uneasy about the direction of recent reforms, many of which attempt to strengthen traditional practices and curtail the search for more imaginative solutions. Even reforms that are clearly warranted are often launched so precipitously that their long-term impact is blunted from the start.

There is, of course, much to improve within the present framework, but if we want the renaissance in learning envisioned in the national reports, we must reconsider the structural factors that make schools so maddeningly inefficient.

For example, as James Raffini (p. 53) explains, the competitive grading system used in most schools practically guarantees that large numbers of students will do less than their best. Genuine reform requires that we redesign the evaluation system to recognize students for what they have learned rather than humiliating them for what they have not learned.

Of course, the grading system is only an element of the larger pattern of schooling which, with its assignments and examinations, forces students and teachers into adversary roles. Fundamental reforms would put students and teachers into a cooperative relationship, and one bolder—for enlisting parents and community members in a partnership for change. This may be the time to truly re-form our schools.

References

