

WHY HAS THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS  
MOVEMENT ACHIEVED PRE-EMINENCE?

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## The Unhappy History of School Development

Dusty classroom shelves storing unused curriculum packages and simulation games, and chalk and talk teaching are familiar to every classroom visitor. John Goodlad's (1970, 1983) studies of elementary and high school teaching have illustrated the isolation of teachers and the lack of change in most American classrooms over the last few decades. Yet state departments of education, districts and local schools have undertaken and continue to support many school development projects to introduce innovation, and to improve the quality of education in twentieth century classrooms.

Common models used for school development; accreditation, evaluation, research, development and dissemination, and systems management have not generally achieved much success in changing schools in the public education system. The current model for school improvement, effective schools, in contrast, has achieved both widespread use and frequently, documented success. What are some of the reasons for the pre-eminence of the effective school movement as the model for school development?

### 2. Accreditation

In the nineteenth century school children were held to be solely responsible for their own academic performance. Since then schools have recognized their role to improve educational processes and to have their students succeed. By the early 1920's improvement in schools was often undertaken through the 'schools' survey method.' Extensive questionnaires were

developed and were used not only to measure student performance and school processes, but also to obtain quantitative data such as resources in schools.

By the 1930's these evaluation processes in the private educational system had expanded to include recognized consortiums of accreditation agencies. To obtain certification, private schools were visited by external teams of experts. These examined school resources, internal organizational processes, numbers of job and college placements and perceptions of staff, students, alumni, parents and performance results (Kyle, 1985).

In order to receive accreditation, these reports were starting points for self-improvement in many private schools. Their schools' survival may have depended on reaching the prescribed standards to obtain accreditation. The accreditation process is still popular in private education today and is one method for self-improvement.

It is easy to identify the reasons which prevented this school development model from receiving prominence in public education. In a publicly financed system which promotes equality of schools, any evaluative system which highlights inequalities and inefficiencies would invite unwanted public criticism. The complexity of the data gathering and the costs of external evaluative teams may have been beyond the expertise and finances of individual schools. Furthermore, much of the quantitative information collected by accreditation teams such as numbers of library books may have seemed unrelated to educational outcomes and may have been beyond the power of individual public schools

to change.

### 3. The Academic Reform Movement

By the 1950's and 1960's, the speed of scientific progress, had become apparent, symbolized by the well publicized success of the Russian Sputnik Satellite. National and state level curricular programmes of the Academic Reform Movement were commenced beginning with new mathematics and science curriculum. New curriculum eventually extended to include all the content areas. School reorganisation also occurred in the 1960's, with the mass development of new instructional techniques. Some techniques included inquiry team teaching, Computer Aided Instruction, multi-media usage, simulations, independent study, individualized instruction and community learning projects (Wood, 1984). At the same time, the New School Designs Movement led to the construction of open concept classrooms and open concept teaching.

The introduction of disadvantaged and compensatory education programmes was another innovation which quickly followed (Comer, 1986) bringing with it many specific programmes such as Head Start.

These large scale reform movements were characterized by their sweeping foci, and mandatory natures. Change was mostly an event marked by the delivery of a new package, construction of a building or an in-service on a new technique. Innovations were usually developed externally to the schools in which they were to

be implemented, and were advertised as universal panaceas regardless of individual school contexts or needs. Teachers and school goals were neglected. The planning failed to recognise new role changes which threatened staff. Teachers, seen as "relatively passive adopters," (Fullan, 1973) were usually unenthusiastic in their reception of these imposed innovations. Classroom and school improvement usually failed to materialize (Farrar, 1983). The era of 'top down' reform using the Research Development and Dissemination (RDD) Model of change was less popular in the 1970's. There was little substantial or significant impact on schools recorded by researchers.

#### 4. Familial Effects Model

The end of the Academic Reform Movement was hastened by the prevailing educational research of the late 1960's (Coleman, 1966; Jenkins, 1972).

Researchers were investigating the effects on test results of the input of resources into schools to improve such factors as curricular offerings, facilities, professional training and per capita student expenditures. These well publicized input-output studies showed that simple changes in the quality of facilities, increases in personnel, or shifts in curricular emphasis did not significantly affect the quality of learning. In contrast, the social and economic demography of the school's neighbourhood were held to be the chief determining factor in academic performance (Fortenberry, 1986). Under this research framework, schools

seemed to be passive partners, which maintained the social status quo (Cohen, 1982). The difficulty in undertaking school improvement as a way to increase learning was becoming apparent.

##### 5. New Management Techniques for School Improvement

The 1970's marked the development of new change models in business and their gradual diffusion into school improvement and educational management processes. Such models included Organizational Development, (OD), Management by Objectives, (MOB) and a Systems Management approach. These approaches were rational in orientation with a logical progression through needs assessment to implementation and evaluation. They depended on clear statements of mission, goals, objectives and the measurement of the gap between present and desired practices, followed by setting priorities and planning the development of strategies to reduce these gaps. Implementation put the needs assessment action plan into effect. Evaluation monitored implementation strategies both to maximize success and to determine the overall effectiveness of the programmes.

Advantages of these school improvement processes included their concern with the cyclical ongoing nature of the planning and the implementation of change. It was seen as a school level activity as well as a district or state function. Using planning grant moneys accustomed many principals and school staffs to the processes of needs assessment, implementation and assessment of

new programmes.

Yet systems management as a school development process failed to match the widespread popularity demonstrated for its use in the business world. Schools proved to be naturalistic systems concerned more with their own survival than with rational processes. Schools possessed multitudinous goals, each with their own advocates who competed on political levels for recognition, support and funds. Principals found the task of defining a clear mission and goals extremely difficult when communities wanted, for instance, such contrasting missions as focus on basic skills, developing self-concept, training good citizens or ensuring education for employment.

Power was also defused. School organizational elements resisted tight bureaucratic linkages. Teachers, virtually independent in their own classrooms, could ignore neat logical planning systems designed by administrators for introducing changes.

Systems management failed to suggest which reform elements would lead to school improvement. Solutions to most needs were intensive in their use of resources and were expensive. Teachers failed to scrutinize their own practices or those of their administrators as a means for meeting needs or increasing efficiency. Purchases of books, video equipment, photocopy equipment and computers were frequently seen as solutions to needs. The model also failed to provide the collegial problem solving and group process strategies essential for implementing changes.

The processes of deriving implications from research data



proved to be complex with many pitfalls (Fullan, 1973). Staffs found systems management processes difficult and would sometimes invert the process, using needs to justify preconceived solutions or jumping to inappropriate solutions without adequate analysis of the problem or consideration of alternatives. Inadequate understanding of strategies for using group processes also occasionally led to the principals making decisions on authoritarian grounds because of prolonged debate and lack of time for consensus (Lipham, 1983).

#### 6. Reform Commissions

By the late 1970's numerous reform commissions (Passow, 1984) urged educational improvements. Recommendations included a return to the 'basics', greater accountability and stricter bureaucratic controls such as competency testing for teachers and students, more time for education, tighter graduation requirements, and teacher certification changes (Michaels, 1988; Network, 1987; Hiatt 1986).

Such reports generally have had little effect on school improvement. The reports failed to specify how the changes would impact on student outcomes or how the changes would be accomplished.

#### 7. The Effective Schools Movement: The Beginning

The Effective Schools Movement appeared in the late 1970's in reaction to two prevailing beliefs. These were the

assumptions that socio-economic status rather than school effects predicted school performance (Wimpelberg, 1987) and that school reform was best accomplished by power-coercive bureaucratic controls. Researchers such as Rutter (1979), Brookover (1979) and Edmonds (1979) were asking these pertinent questions. If school performance reflected the socio-economic status of their communities, why were there some exceptionally successful urban elementary schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods? What were the characteristics of these atypically successful schools? Could replicating these characteristics in other schools make those schools more effective?

The effective schools movement received publicity and popularity because of its 'crusade' to prove: (1) that schools did make a difference in their students' performance, (2) that equity of schooling outcomes was essential and (3) that advocacy for educational success for the disadvantaged was important (Wimpelberg, 1987).

Furthermore, the movement reflected many of the conservative recommendations in the reform commission reports. Common assumptions shared by both reform reports and the effective school movement included: schools need improvement, all children can learn sufficiently to succeed, success can be measured by student standardized test scores, equity in outcomes must be produced for the poor as well as for the wealthy, a focus on basic skills was essential, and teachers must use diagnostic assessment regularly (Willis, 1984). In addition, the success of the effective schools movement was enhanced by its assertion that reforms in schools could be implemented by process changes and

that changing teacher practices did not require large financial expenditures other than for professional development.

### 8. Characteristics of Effective Schools

Effective schools were to be defined in the 1980's by many criteria (Frederick, 1987). However, the most widely quoted article, which launched the movement (Edmonds, 1979), referred to effective urban schools as those in which all the students annually obtained the skills which were prerequisite for succeeding at the next grade level. Such schools, when examined by Edmonds (1979, 1982) were found to contain these effective school characteristics:

- a safe and orderly environment with all workers taking responsibility for it all the time everywhere in the school
- a clear school mission which is cohesive, well known and understood
- instructional leadership exercised by the principal
- high expectations by the teachers of student success in achieving minimum mastery for progress
- opportunity for student learning without interruption with a maximal amount of student time on task
- frequent monitoring of student progress through standardized tests and use of this diagnostic information for remediation
- A positive school climate marked by professional collegiality, cooperation and shared values
- Promotion of close home and school relations.

During the 1980's these characteristics were summarized and expanded in many forms through numerous case studies of effective schools, comparisons of effective and ineffective schools and evaluations of effective programmes.

Research extended from urban elementary schools to schools of many sizes, levels, locations and racial compositions not only in the United States but also cross-culturally (Behling, 1981). The direction of research moved from equity to those behaviours of teachers that led to high achievement generally. Effectiveness was also examined in various ways and for various subjects (Wimpelberg, 1987). Yet all the results continued to agree.

The indicators of effectiveness were also elaborated. For instance, instructional leadership was expanded into techniques for principals to ensure such effective teaching practices as carefully structured sequenced and paced instruction, good classroom management, careful planning about goals, content, materials and activities, and alignment between curriculum and testing (Cohen, 1982). Such approaches as using direct instruction, mastery learning, or cooperative learning, maintaining high teacher expectations and increasing engaged time received attention as means to improve instructional effectiveness.

By the mid-1980's, most American state education departments had published their own lists of effective school characteristics with specific behavioural indicators for measuring these qualities. These lists often presented as questionnaires and

interview formats, combined research from teacher effectiveness studies, classroom management theory, instructional leadership studies, and school climate research. They provided an useful starting point for gathering school data and developing school profiles with recommended priorities for improvement.

### 9. The Process for Developing School Effectiveness

By the early 1980's, many schools and school districts had commenced school improvement programmes based on effective schools research. The planning process followed by schools was similar to that used in the accreditation and systems management models (Carlson, 1986).

Schools established school based planning committees which surveyed staff, teachers and students with questionnaires or interviews. The collected data was analyzed, a school profile developed, and priorities set concerning needs. Sub-committees were established to address specific needs by examining alternatives ideas, selecting solutions and devising action plans and timelines for implementation. Planning frequently took a year with implementation taking two to three years. The planning committees would generally monitor implementation processes, and evaluate the programmes.

### 10. Advantages of the Effective Schools Model

The uniqueness of the Effective School model over previous models lay in its designation of a few major correlates of effective schools. The overall interaction or synergy

created a 'critical mass' transforming a school into a place of effectiveness. Teachers were happy to embrace the common sense notion that the indicators of the correlates of effective schools would increase performance (Newfeld, 1983).

The model was more pragmatic and non-theoretical than most in its approach to the issues of school improvements, providing a series of easy steps for planning. It motivated teachers by dealing with nearly universal concerns: teachers' and administrators' desires to teach basic skills, needs for high student performance on tests and for good student behaviour. There was also the respectability of work which was based on a solid research base. The approach converged many strands of educational research on self-concept, expectations, teaching and administrative theory into a coherent whole with many practical recommendations for teachers and administrators (Miller, 1983).

The process focused on teachers' involvement in decision making, exercising responsibility, enjoying autonomy and developing new leadership roles. This focus was on people and their concerns not innovations with collegial participation frequently leading to teacher commitment and follow through. The approach acknowledged the importance of school culture, staff roles, role relationships and the interactions and exchanges which are the basis of social systems.

The focus on individual schools as the unit of change harnessed the support and drive of leadership and committees which were permanently within the school continually to motivate staff and to oversee and carry through improvements.

The process nature of the model involving staff in the choice of areas of focus and solutions permitted reforms to be developed which fitted the individual context and needs of the school. These reforms were more likely to succeed than externally developed and imposed reforms. Furthermore, the reforms instituted by the process looked at how administrators and teachers functioned in the classroom. The associated costs were relatively low when compared to those associated with competing change models.

Lastly, success breeds success. School improvement efforts based on the correlates of effective schools research seemed generally to work by increasing student performance as measured by standardized tests. The process in many schools was said to have captured the interest and imagination of many of the staff, unleashing their energy and commitment. It often "revitalized those who were demotivated and generated enthusiasm for joint work on common goals" (Farrar, 1983, 1984). It provided teachers with optimism about their chances of success and a sense of efficacy in accomplishing change that improved student results.

#### 11. The Spread of the Effective Schools Model

The number of competing research based approaches school improvement were few. By 1982 many schools were seeing the Effective Schools model as "the only game in town" (Leotte, 1982). It became, Brandt (1982) stated "the new catechism" for urban school improvement.

By the mid 1980's many major school effectiveness studies

had been completed leading to a "maturing of the research field" (Teddlie, 1987). A National Council of Effective Schools had been established while most universities ran specific educational courses for teachers and administrators on implementing effective schools processes. Many education departments funded effective school sections to support effective school planning with questionnaires, data processing, facilitators and professional development programmes. Other states contracted educational laboratories or universities to assist schools. Some states such as California promoted effective school planning by providing large per capita incentive grants to support improvement processes in schools and new programmes. Other states or districts mandated effective school programmes for low achieving schools. (Edmonds, 1982)

A 1984 study (Farrar, 1984) found thirty nine programmes in twenty five states involving 2,378 schools. Sixty percent of the programmes claimed a positive amount of impact. Even the critics generally appeared happy with the model's success at bringing educational improvement into the classroom (Purkey, 1982).

## 12 Conclusions

The success of the effective schools model for school development over competing models is apparent. Unlike the 'accreditation' model, concern is not in the celebration of 'efficiency' but in the process of becoming more efficient. Consequently, the model fits the ethos of public education.



Unlike the systems management approach, clear direction is provided to schools as to specific areas, techniques and innovations associated with efficiency. Finally, in contrast to the innovations era of the 1960's, attention is paid to factors associated with successful innovation: the uniqueness of each school context, the importance of school culture, and the participation of the whole school staff in planning and implementation. The model is cost efficient and provides a focus on classroom instruction which has proven successful in increasing test scores. School improvement and growth in efficiency has been the hallmark of education in the 1980's.

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