

THE GOODLAD OCCASIONAL PAPERS

About Our Schools: Introduction

December 2011

I begin this series of papers with a kind of primer regarding what education is, what schools are for, and what we need to do to get education and schools both better understood and more strongly embedded in the nation's culture. Fulfilling my intent is a formidable challenge. But it is imperative for the well-being of the American people that we get beyond the tinkering of the past half-century and bring about comprehensive renewal of our schools, which are the major conduit for educating the young and ensuring a democratic populace.

Even if those of us who have spent our careers in the vineyards of schooling were to receive invitations to join the powers that be in the current era of federal-driven reform, we would accomplish little. The external-to-school model of change has, over and over, left intact the longstanding deep structure, symbols, and grammar of schooling.

Given the present highest-yet budget of the federal Department of Education, a well-planned effort might improve what we have by 15 or 20 percent. Wonderful! There would be widespread celebration, and the president would get some brownie points. But those few people who inquire deeply into the entirety of the culture of individual schools would not join the celebration. Unfortunately, a solid improvement in what we have would further entrench it and continue

our unawareness of at least 50 percent of what constitutes the potential deliberate educative role of every school in America. I address this untapped potential in Occasional Paper No. 2.

I plan to write over the next year or two a dozen or more papers about our schools. Some people will want just to read them, others might want to get together to discuss them, and still others might want to go beyond simply reading or discussing to join groups of neighbors, parents, and school personnel to bring back to their communities a larger part of the agency for the goals and conduct of their local school or schools. This latter group would essentially create what they thought they once had: schools of, by, and for the people. Later, I will write about the importance of our communities' becoming increasingly better educated and the potential of the school-community relationship.

If my writing sometimes appears to be obtuse, some brief references may help, and of course, there are many other sources of information and enlightenment. I will try to make every paper part of a story of America's schooling – past, present, future, or all three. This story is akin to the story of life itself, which is not bundled in silos. And this point brings me to what several of my friends and colleagues and I are doing or plan to do and why.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the control and functioning of our public schools have steadily moved out of local communities to the federal government and the corporate leaders who influence it. With this move, the purposes of schooling have become increasingly oriented to America's position in the global economy, and the curriculum has narrowed accordingly. Nevertheless, many parents throughout these years have had a kind of love affair with their schools.

Criticism of the schools' failure to strengthen the nation's economy comes easily, but there are no easy answers to the question of what schools should do. Several reform eras since the late 1950s have gotten little further than recommending the strengthening of the sciences and mathematics curricula. In 1972, Robert M. Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago, wrote: "Nobody has a kind word for the institution that was only the other day the foundation of our freedom, the guarantee of our future, the cause of our prosperity and power, the bastion of our security, the bright and shining beacon that was the source of our enlightenment, the public school" ("The Great Anti-School Campaign," in *The Great Ideas Today*, 1972, p. 154).

Of course, Hutchins was teasing us a bit. But a huge gap was growing between the increasingly powerful distant officials who control the nation's schools and those schools' trusting, rather innocent parents, friends, and teachers. For forty-two years, from 1968 to 2010, the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools exhibited a good deal of Hutchins's summary of years past. This

high regard was still considerable in 2010, but a concern crept into the ratings: parents and others gave a substantial number of good-to-great marks for *the schools they knew* but believed there were many bad ones "out there." They were being taught by everybody who had no kind words for the public school institution.

I believe that this long-term increasing gap between the clients and local stewards of our public schools – who once had substantial agency for them – and those, commonly distant, who have gained most of this agency has created a large part of the schooling mess we are in.

The latter group is focused almost solely on the academic development of the young. A bundle of research reveals that parents (and many others) want not only academic learning but also personal, social, and vocational development – and, innocently, believe that all four goals are getting some attention. There are, however, increasing signs of doubt. I will address this warming educational stew in coming Occasional Papers.

By 2010, it was abundantly clear that there was not going to be a new story for America's schools, and probably not in the lives of many who chanted "Yes We Can" in Chicago's Grant Park during President-elect Obama's speech on Election Day 2008. The wisdom necessary for bringing about this new story was either missing, unavailable, or ignored. Frederick Taylor's concept of allowing no thinking in the workplace, introduced a century ago and followed by large businesses such as the Ford Motor Company, is still with us.

Little of schooling today is education, which is a complex process of

becoming a unique human being and, as philosopher Mortimer Adler put it, “discharging everyone’s moral obligation to lead a good life and make as much of one’s self as possible” (*We Hold These Truths*, 1987, p. 20). Our elementary, secondary, and tertiary sequence of schooling has increasingly become a training tool, no longer a significant component of the community. Harry R. Lewis, former dean of Harvard College, notes that consumer satisfaction is replacing the educational mission of our great universities (*Excellence Without a Soul*, 2006). More about higher education in a later Occasional Paper.

We will never have the democracy we celebrate until we have the human infrastructure necessary to its educative excellence. And we will never have that infrastructure until we have schooling or a comparable enterprise capable of addressing everything of *educational need* or, to borrow the words of behavioral scientist Ralph Tyler, everything educational that is not being taken care of in the rest of the culture. The renewal of the nation’s schools, one by one, calls for democratic action led by those closest to children and youths in their communities and by well-prepared stewards. The time is now.



Where does one begin and how does one proceed to create a new day for schooling that educates the young for a good life and responsible behavior? Not with imposed reform; we have tried that since the 1950s and, among other regressions, reduced the relationship between parents and their children’s

schools. Significant change and renewal come from the inside; they are not imposed from the outside.

The inside is much more than the classrooms and the teacher-pupil relationships – which, strangely, is almost all of the substance of present and past school reform. And what assesses performance of students, teachers, and their schools hardly correlates with the context beyond. Corporate leaders rail for higher academic test scores, but the relationship of test scores to the performance of employees remains low.

I have been guilty in my long career of paying excessive attention to what Stanford University professors David Tyack and Larry Cuban refer to as the *grammar* of schooling: the detailed ways and deliberate teaching of the young carried out in the classrooms (*Tinkering Toward Utopia*, 1995). But I was far from alone. Historian and educator TheodoreSizer observed that those symbols and practices hardened into place long ago and for generations have been under *rhetorical assault*.

From all the talk, one might have expected a fundamental shift in the way public education was governed and financed. This was not to be. The momentum of existing practice was believed to be too strong to provide new arrangements with much chance for success. The sanctity of the symbols of school – graduation at age eighteen, homecoming. . . . Friday night football, sorting wealthier kids from less wealthy kids and kids of color, and the like – were deeply embedded in the ways the American middle class shaped its experiences.

Alternatives to this, however ingenious and rational, had, not surprisingly, little political traction (“Back to *A Place Called School*,” in Kenneth A. Sirotnik and Roger Soder, eds., *The Beat of a Different Drummer*, 1999), p. 113.

From the late 1950s to the present, the federal government became increasingly the agency of our so-called school system, much in need of reform. For more than four decades of these years, the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools reported high approval.

What a ridiculous, nonsensical situation. Wake up, America!



Wake up to what? Late in the twentieth century, in anticipation of the twenty-first, I was hearing from many sources that a new day for schooling, “all for our children,” was on its way, just as there would be a great turning of other segments of our culture. These expectations faded away very quickly. It was the coming of an interesting new president that stirred them again with “Yes we can” in November 2008.

The years from 2006 into 2010 spun me into an educational metamorphosis that emerged out of a life-threatening illness and the death of my beloved wife of sixty years. I read a lot, during those years, stirring me in the later months to consider how to stimulate communities to give greater attention to their schools. I happened to remember, a couple of

decades back, a professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia coming up with an idea to enrich the intellect and discourse of the populace.

His plan was to persuade the owner or manager of a café, coffee house, or bistro to host an early evening conversation with the author of a recent book, a critic of the arts, an interesting economist, or whatever. After the guest had given a fifteen- or twenty-minute talk or display, participants could enjoy (and pay for) a cup of coffee, a glass of wine, or some food and join in the discussion. The concept and participation in what was named a Renaissance Café spread across Canada and, with other identification, sections of the United States. What an interesting idea!

After my reading, thinking, and dreaming had percolated for a while, the time had come for me to bring together a group with whom to share, change, and add to my thinking. There was agreement with and even enthusiasm for writing short, no-more-than-ten-page articles to float out into the world. Ideas flowed quickly, and there was agreement to conduct a sort of Renaissance Café that a colleague would arrange. A few weeks later, most of us were able to join in lively conversation with others he had invited.

Several weeks later, we came together again to share, change, and add to our thinking. We had common interests, many of us agreeing on the need for sweeping changes in our public schools and the folly of the emerging reform era. We also realized that our time was out of sync with our ideas. But we agreed that the Renaissance Café and Occasional Papers would enjoy a reciprocal relationship.

Papers 1 and 2 have now been written; number 3 is on the way. The challenge now is to get them out to individuals and groups across the country: people who are increasing their understanding of public schooling, especially its history; groups using the Renaissance Café genre of educational enrichment; and parents, their friends, and school personnel seeking to ensure comprehensive education for every youth and child. It takes the whole community.

My primary intent with the Occasional Papers is to create civic awareness of the steady loss of state and community agency for our schools and to provide an evidence-based path toward their renewal. We need the dawning of a new school day as medical education needed and attained a new day during the first half of the twentieth century. The leaders, after hot debate, managed to let the old day fade away.

But that is not an option for our schools. The medical education field did not have millions of young people waiting each day for its doors to open. And the Carnegie Foundation (with others to come) did not need to tussle with and bow to the federal government for necessary resources.

The nation faces the challenges of sustaining over a long period of time two essential, very different, components of this schooling enterprise, whether public or private. One is that of federal responsibility, such as ensuring equity, compliance, and citizens' rights. The other is much more of educational substance. I will address details in later Occasional Papers.

There is nothing in our Constitution that even suggests federal government agency for the goals and conduct of the nation's schools. Rather, the expectation is that states and communities will take charge; the federal government is responsible for ensuring the well-being of our democracy (The Forum for Education and Democracy, *Democracy at Risk*, 2008). Yes, with civic discourse and constructive action, together we can.

Readers: Should you be interested in my credentials, please see the attached page.

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Biographical Sketch

John I. Goodlad was born in Canada and educated in that country to the level of the master's degree. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and honorary doctorates from twenty colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. He has taught at all grade levels and in a variety of institutions, including a one-room rural school in Canada. He has held professorships and administrative positions at Agnes Scott College and Emory University in Georgia, the University of Chicago, and the University of California at Los Angeles. Currently, he is professor emeritus of education at the University of Washington and president of the independent Institute for Educational Inquiry in Seattle.

Goodlad has authored, co-authored, or edited over three dozen books; has written chapters and papers in more than 100 other books and yearbooks; and has published more than 200 articles in professional journals and encyclopedias. Some of his books have been translated into such languages as Japanese, Chinese, French, Italian, Spanish, and Hebrew. His 1984 publication, *A Place Called School*, received the Outstanding Book of the Year Award from the American Educational Research Association and the Distinguished Book of the Year Award from Kappa Delta Pi. He also received the Outstanding Writing Award from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education for *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools* (published in 1990). Several other books have received various awards. His research and scholarship was recognized in 1993 with the American Educational Research Association Award for Distinguished Contributions to Educational Research. In 1999, he was a recipient of the Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Prize in Education; in 2000, he received the James Bryant Conant Award for Outstanding Service to Education from the Education Commission of the States; in 2002, he received the first Brock International Prize in Education; in 2003, he received the New York Academy of Public Education Medal; in 2004, he received the American Education Award from the American Association of School Administrators; and in 2005, he received the Association of Teacher Educators Distinguished Educator Award. In 2009, he received the Outstanding Friend of Public Education award from the Horace Mann League and the Outstanding Achievement Award from the John Dewey Society.

For the past fifty years, Goodlad has been involved in an array of educational improvement programs and projects and has engaged in large-scale studies of educational change, schooling, and teacher education. His studies of teacher education, conducted with colleagues, resulted in the publication in 1990 of three books, two with colleagues: *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* and *Places Where Teachers Are Taught* (John I. Goodlad, Roger Soder, and Kenneth A. Sirotnik, editors). The findings, conclusions, and recommendations are reported in Goodlad's book, *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools*. His 1994 book, *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools*, advances some of the concepts in the 1990 trilogy.

In addition to advancing a comprehensive program of research and development directed to the simultaneous renewal of schooling and teacher education, Goodlad is inquiring into the mission of education in a democratic society to which such renewal must be directed. In his book *In Praise of Education* (1997), Goodlad argues that education is an inalienable right in a democratic society, and he engages the reader in a conversation on the purpose of education: to develop individual and collective democratic character. This mission is further developed in the following books: *Education for Everyone: Agenda for Education in a Democracy* (2004), written with Corinne Mantle-Bromley and Stephen J. Goodlad; *The Teaching Career* (2004), coedited with Timothy J. McMannon); a 20th anniversary edition of *A Place Called School* (2004); *Romances with Schools: A Life of Education* (2004); and *Education and the Making of a Democratic People*, coedited with Roger Soder and Bonnie McDaniel (2008).