

THE GOODLAD OCCASIONAL

Volume One, Issue Six

June 2, 2006

In the first issue of *The Goodlad Occasional*, I provided some definitions of words that are common today in conversations about schooling that I knew would appear in these occasional epistles: “education,” “renewal,” “reform,” “simultaneous renewal,” and “change.” Educational “renewal,” is something that schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions try to do to improve themselves—because they want to. Educational “reform,” on the other hand, is something that people outside of these institutions want those inside of them to do. It is imposed rather than self-generated. Unfortunately, educators tend to use the words synonymously. For years I have been trying in vain to bring an end to this practice.

Having been an educator for a long time, I have had the good fortune to study several reform eras. No Child Left Behind is neither the first nor, I am afraid, the last of these. They all have followed a linear input-output model of change that simply ignores the complex culture of educational institutions, such as schools and colleges. Social psychologist Seymour Sarason has made it abundantly clear in his book *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change* and other writing that linear models of change and the complex ecosystems of schools rarely mesh in constructive ways. I have endeavored to describe and explain the dissonance in chapter four of my book *In Praise of Education*. Barbara Benham Tye has described the failure of the linear

model to change any of the deep structure of schooling that hardened into place many decades ago and badly needs renewal. The repeated failure of school reform eras to effect the change we need in our educational institutions should have told us long ago that the linear (almost always authoritarian) model has failed us. How many times must we fail (at enormous human and material expense) before we learn?

What should have come through to the reader in issue four of *The Goodlad Occasional* is that Dean Maria Chavez eschewed mandate and authoritarian decree in seeking to grease the wheels for educational renewal among the necessary partners in teacher education. She envisioned departments in the arts and sciences, components of the college of education, and the partner schools having to be engaged in self-renewal if they were to succeed in tripartite simultaneous renewal. She planted seeds of renewal in the groups with which she met.

The plantings from these seeds were popping up here and there during spring 2006. It would be a grave error, however, to conclude that Dean Chavez was responsible for everything that was occurring. Although there has been a good deal of research on educational change and agreement on its nature by those who have studied it most carefully, we must recognize that educational change, like many other phenomena in our social and political surround, is

difficult to track down and explain. The writing of Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences, for example, has had a major impact on the thinking of educators nationwide. This does not mean that more than a small fraction of these have read his published articles, let alone his books. They may have attended a conference where he spoke or where someone spoke about his work, or they might simply have been caught up in his ideas through conversations or in staff development sessions of their school district. Often, ideas catch hold without there having been any direct contact with their original sources.

In issue four of *The Goodlad Occasional*, I noted that Dean Chavez endeavored to include in meetings she convened with key administrators individuals she selected carefully because of the relevance of the proceedings to their work. In her presentations to groups, she identified areas of need regarding change that could not readily be ignored or challenged. For example, one can hardly reject the recommendation that robust teacher education programs require the collaboration of the three groups of players that contribute to them: in the arts and sciences, in the college of education, and in the partner schools. But she wisely held back from specifying how this might be done. Instead she called for creativity. What she accomplished over time was the development of a cadre of individuals who spread the word and often engaged with others in the pros and cons of the Chavez agenda.

This issue of *The Goodlad Occasional* picks up from where I left off in issue five.



By spring 2006, word of what was going on and speculation about what might go on was widespread. Teacher education was not the only domain of discourse. And the renewal of teacher education no longer required a great deal of the time and attention of the dean. Conversation about institutional renewal had now become quite widespread. It is the *human conversation* that renews our work and, indeed, our lives and the world.

Throughout the year at Emerald Elementary School, there had been a great deal of discussion about and within the group of seven, six, and eight student teachers who had constituted the cohort group successively through the fall, winter, and spring quarters of the school year. Students, members of the regular teaching staff, and university personnel who participated in the ongoing teacher education program were enthusiastic about what had occurred. There was complete agreement on the importance of the student teachers' having space of their own and on the necessity of their getting an orientation to the entire school as well as to the realities of classroom teaching. There was uniform agreement on requesting that the temporary building or its equivalent be a permanent fixture on the school campus. Of course, there was now the problem of satisfying the demand of other partner schools for similar arrangements.

There was less agreement on Tom Delaney's proposal that his concept and conduct of a multi-aged, multi-graded classroom be expanded. Only a couple of his colleagues endorsed his recommendation of creating a completely multi-aged, multi-graded classroom structure for the entire school. But, as the end of the 2005-2006 school year loomed,

two of the teachers who taught children in the first and second grades expressed an interest in having classes that embraced both of these grade levels. One of them had read about a school that had adopted multiple-age, multiple-grade classes so as to create alternative placements for each child. This teacher had come to the conclusion that the placement of each child in the best possible learning environment each year required variability in the age and grade structure of each classroom. The possibility of moving entirely to such a structure was put on hold for discussions that would ensue at the beginning of the 2006–2007 school year. Meanwhile, Tom and his two colleagues would work on how they might align the grades of their classes and work as a team during the coming year.

Interest in becoming partner schools affiliated with Northern Lights University emerged from a varied array of schools during the year, some of them located a considerable distance from the University. This had brought on within the University lively discussions of what should constitute the geographic region from which partner schools would be selected. Teacher education faculty members at Northern Lights University had decided to select only partner schools within a half-hour drive when a very interesting and unexpected opportunity arose. A request came from the principal of Fairmont High School, an institution enrolling more than 1,800 students, located just off the interstate highway about ninety miles to the north. Fairmont was in the process of restructuring into several “houses” of no more than 400 students each. The school was used from time to time by neighboring Jefferson State University for the placement of student teachers but had not yet moved to the cohort group pattern in the process of

development at Northern Lights University. But the Fairmont High faculty was very interested in this kind of arrangement.

Interestingly, Dean Maria Chavez and Dean Robert Carver of Jefferson State had been talking together from time to time about an idea put forward by the latter. Jefferson State did not have doctoral programs. Carver and his colleagues were faced with the problem of providing a large enough staff of adequately prepared faculty members to take care of the large numbers of new teachers prepared by the institution each year. He wanted “hybrid” faculty members: individuals with experience in the cultures of elementary or secondary schools as well as in the culture of higher education. He had proposed to Dean Chavez that Northern Lights University tailor a professional preparation program for future teacher educators who would have hands-on clinical experience in the teacher education program of Jefferson State University as part of their preparation. Dean Chavez very much liked the idea and had brought it to the attention of her faculty without endorsing it or taking a stand with respect to its merits. As was typical of her behavior, she simply dropped the seed of the idea and waited to see if it would find fertile ground. The idea had found its way into the faculty discussion of the geographic limits of partner schools because a professor noted that Northern Lights University could place in a unique high school such as Fairmont both a cohort of future teachers and a doctoral student in an advanced teacher education program conducted jointly by the two universities. Another professor suggested that they look into the joint doctorates of several campuses of the University of California and the California State University

system. Clearly, what Deans Carver and Chavez had been talking about would be high on the agenda in the 2006–2007 academic year.

By spring 2006, the pattern of schools inquiring about or applying to be partner schools at Northern Lights University was looking more like a spider web than a network, largely because some of the schools already belonged to networks. A middle school claimed membership in the League of Small Democratic Schools, a dozen or so innovative schools that came together for mutual support because the demands of the No Child Left Behind act was squeezing out so many of the educational features that had made these schools good in the eyes of their patrons. They did not want to lose their unique characteristics. The members of this regional group met from time to time with members of other regional groups that constituted the present whole of the League. All shared a common interest in what they referred to as the democratic public purpose of education. The principal of the League school conveying the request for becoming a partner school expressed the hope that he and his colleagues would get help from the University in developing an assessment system for determining the extent to which both the school and its classrooms were being conducted in a democratic manner.

An interesting application came from a secondary school in another network – the Coalition of Essential Schools. It was a small newly constructed school that enjoyed support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It was on land adjacent to a site where there already was both a small elementary school and a small junior high school. One of the unique features of this high school was

that it had a future teachers club, the members of which spent part of their time in assisting with the teaching of the younger children in the elementary and junior high schools. Teachers in all three schools thought that having cohort groups of student teachers from Northern Lights University would be beneficial to the educational programs of all four institutions.

The applications coming in revealed a wide variety of understandings of and approaches to educational renewal. Given that every school is different, isn't this better than having a range of attempts to satisfy the requirements of a blueprint? The agendas ranged from being very simple to being very complex. Some schools were seeking to respond to a very short, simple list of questions. One school began with just two simple questions: What problems do we have in our school that could be cleared up in just a few months? and What problems do we have that might require planning and execution over a period of several years? Once they answered these questions, they moved on to the determination and execution of what they believed to be promising strategies for addressing the problems identified. This seemingly simple procedure ultimately led to very serious discussions, such as about the overall mission of this school in a changing world. Schools with rather complex initial procedures, such as writing and discussing the writing of strategic plans, seemed to have great difficulty in moving from planning to acting. Trying to move from planning to acting now constituted agendas for 2006–2007. The message to Northern Lights University was that they were not yet ready to become partner schools.



It should be abundantly clear from the above, both implicitly and explicitly, that I favor change processes that may be stimulated from the outside but that, in practice, begin at the grassroots and move upward and outward. Is this just an idiosyncratic preference or is there support for it? There is supporting evidence in the inquiries of Seymour Sarason, Michael Fullan, and Andy Hargreaves. In our study of deliberate efforts to effect educational change in eighteen schools in southern California (the League of Cooperating Schools), colleagues and I found plenty of supporting evidence.

Is there theory supporting the above? Yes, indeed. The substantial body of work leading to systems theory and complexity theory shows that significant renewal proceeds when those closest to the work set policy and guide practice. Control from above or outside the work environment becomes increasingly ineffective as its ecosystem becomes more complex. This is a principle that too many school board members and administrators never learn. And it is a major reason why so little changes but the appearance of change.

I favor ecological theory, a kind of combination of systems and complexity theory. Since schools, school districts, colleges, and universities are ecosystems involving complex relationships among people and things, any theory of change regarding them must be ecological in character. In their history of American schooling in the twentieth century, David Tyack and Larry Cuban attempt to describe and, to some degree, account for the stumbling linear attempts to improvement suggested by the wonderful title of their book, *Tinkering toward Utopia*. Since this is a historical account, they do

not provide a litany of recommendations, but they do conclude that what I would refer to as continuous renewal is likely to occur only when the ongoing effort is embedded in local schools and communities.

What we need now are not detailed blueprints and mandates for changes needed but the adoption of a fundamentally different theory of change than the one that has sought to effect school reform for as long as I can remember.



I have enormous confidence in the ability of educators to change their institutions in very positive ways. However, they will not be able to do this unless they are supported by the communities in which they work. Gaining this support is one of the most important components of the educational agenda that challenges us.

This is the final issue of volume one. Whether or not there will be a volume two of The Goodlad Occasional remains to be seen. If feedback suggests some powerful themes that might be productively addressed, there might be. However, I have before me some major writing commitments that must be fulfilled before I take on anything else.

With best wishes for a very satisfying summer,

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