

THE GOODLAD OCCASIONAL PAPERS

About Our Schools: Introduction

July 2011

I begin with a brief introduction to the mechanics of what follows: getting out a kind of primer regarding what education is, what schools are for, and what we need to do to get both better understood and 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 soon 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 for those of us who have spent our careers in the vineyards of schooling to receive unlikely invitations to join the powers that be in the current era of federal-driven reform 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 know better. 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 potential in Occasional Paper No. 2.

I plan to write over the next year or two a dozen or more papers about our schools, which will find their way to people who just want to read them, want to get together to discuss them, or want to go beyond simply reading or discussing to create or join groups of neighbors, parents, school personnel, and others to bring back to their communities a larger part of the agency for the goals and conduct of their local school or schools, essentially 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 appears to be obtuse, some brief references may help, and of course, there are many other sources of information and enlightenment. You will encounter bits and pieces of earlier issues of Occasional Papers in most or probably all to come. I try to make every paper part of a story of America's schooling – past, present, future, or all three. This is akin to the story of life itself, which is not bundled in silos. It brings me to what several of my friends and colleagues and I are doing or plan to do and why.

For most of the twentieth century, the control and functioning of our public schools has steadily moved out of local communities to the federal government and the corporate leaders who influence it. With this move, the purposes of schooling became increasingly oriented to America's position in the global economy, and the curriculum 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 they should do. Several reform eras from the late 1950s into the 1980s got 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 custodians of 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 was exhibiting a good deal of Hutchins's summary of good 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 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) not only want 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, 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 work place, 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.

This will not come from another National Commission on Excellence in Education; nor will it emerge from a federal act or other political intervention. Social scientists who have over the years developed a monumental body of knowledge about education and human behavior are ignored by those in charge of the schooling enterprise. I was shocked by pundit David Brooks’s piece in the *New York Times*, in which he dumped these scholars into one pot controlled by the educational unions. He usually does his homework. When he does address the topic again, and I trust he will, presumably he will write a different story.

But let us now ignore the machinations of the conventional wisdom driving present school reform. 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, and they together are the primary human infrastructure.



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, not from imposition 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 deliberate teaching of the young carried out in the classrooms (*Tinkering Toward Utopia*,

1995). But my friend, historian and educator TheodoreSizer, in a paper entitled "Back to A Place Called School" (in Kenneth Sirotnik and Roger Soder, eds., *The Beat of a Different Drummer*, 1999) woke me up.

His observation was very much expanded and clarified in my educational metamorphosis that emerged out of a life-threatening illness and the death of my beloved wife of sixty years. Thank you , Jane Roland Martin, for your book, *Educational Metamorphoses* (2007). It provided intellectual framework for writing the Goodlad Occasional Papers and the accompanying book I hope to get back to soon. Much of the former will reappear in the latter.

The years from 2006 into 2010 ended most (I hope) of my naiveté regarding the rhetoric of our schools' being "all for the children." Very little in the schools really is. And, considerably to my concern, it roused my attention to philosopher Hannah Arendt's comments about the paucity of good ideas moving to action.

I read a lot; always have. Perhaps I should envy the tide of young people who are not hooked on books. The many books I read during my illness and metamorphosis stirred me, this ancient mariner, to consider inquiring into and taking action regarding stimulating both greater attention of communities to their schools and greater public understanding of and participation in the totality of schooling's potential educating of the young.

I re-read the concluding chapter of David Korten's *The Great Turning* (2006). Scholars, particularly historians, provide little comment regarding how readers

might use productively the information provided. This is not their responsibility. But he provides brief statements regarding what the members of various segments of our culture might do to bring about the great turning he describes. I noted from the dust jacket of the book that his concept of Earth Community "provides a framework for grasping the potential of this historic moment." But his and many other powerful scholarly writings regarding the coming of a new America are piled up and largely ignored. Blogging is not doing.

I have always been a dreamer as well as a reader. I happened to remember that, a couple of decades back, a professor at the Simon Fraser University in British Columbia came up with an interesting idea: get the owner or manager of a café, coffee house, or bistro to announce an early evening conversation with the author of a recent book, a critic of the arts, an interesting economist or whatever, after the guest's fifteen- or twenty-minute talk. Enjoy (and pay for) a cup of coffee, glass of wine, or some food and join in. The concept and participation in what was named a Renaissance Café spread across Canada and, with other identification, sections of the United States.

The time had come for me to call together a group with whom to share, change, and add to my thinking. There was agreement with and even enthusiasm for my proposal of writing short, no-more-than-ten-page articles, which I named Goodlad Occasional Papers, to float out into internet space. Each member of this group had received a copy of Paper No. 1. 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 with carefully selected others in the conference room of a new University of Washington institute headed by a professor on the Bothell Campus, a member of our group.

There was lively conversation and strong support for the plan presented. The coming of summer 2011 blocked most of our further planning and activities. But later we will bring together a rather different trial group, members of which will receive in advance this document and Occasional Paper No. 1. The initial planning team will meet again and address, particularly, the scope and conduct of our educative enterprise.

It will be modest. We do not have a grant and are not at this time seeking one. Our proposed work does not correlate neatly with the present philanthropic foundation zeitgeist of funding. My largest, most comprehensive educational research enterprise of the past depended on what I term “progressive funding” – the getting of necessary financial resources for important activities not fully anticipated and budgeted initially. We need only a few hundred thousand dollars for the present exploratory initiative, but we will not be able to size up significantly its future national scope without also sizing up the necessary budget.

My optimistic expectation is that someone in this great country with personal or foundation financial resources, after reading some of the occasional papers and realizing that a serious, competent, experienced group of educational researchers and practitioners is going to enter into the conduct of some schools and revitalize their communities’

educational components now lying dormant, will offer financial support. Envisioned will be a path to getting America’s schools out of their continuing educational inertia at much less cost than that of school reform eras, especially the current one.

Coming along behind our present undertaking is a plan to develop school-community educational models in all of the nation’s census centers over a period of several years. The cost will be very much less than the present federal Race to the Top competitive forays into school reform.



We need the dawning of a new school day, just as medical education needed and attained a new dawn over several decades during the first half of the twentieth century. The leaders of medical education, after hot debate, managed to let the old day fade away. But that is not an option for our schools.

Those who spent their lives and careers studying, recommending, and working in or with the nation’s elementary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions want the best for the schools we have. Many still help. But few educators have been asked by the leaders of today’s reform era to participate. Even fewer have been asked to present their ideas; and those who were have not seen them on the action agenda.

The readiness for David Korten’s and other learned thinkers’ Great Turning is still palpable, but much of the “Yes We Can” challenge has splintered into “Yes

YOU Can," Mr. President. It must be re-envisioned and acted upon by local communities and the stewards of their schools. 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 compliance and equity.

My 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. With civic discourse and constructive action, colleagues and I

would hope to have the monetary resources to support the becoming of a new school day in school-community settings of, initially, at least ten states. With your enlightenment and commitment to innovation, yes, 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).