

# A Place Called School

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE



John I. Goodlad

# *A Place Called School*

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

JOHN I. GOODLAD

McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY

*New York • St. Louis • San Francisco  
Auckland • Bogotá • Hamburg • Johannesburg • London  
Mexico • Montreal • New Delhi • Panama • Paris  
São Paulo • Singapore • Sydney • Tokyo • Toronto*

Copyright © 1984 by the Institute for the Development of Educational Activities, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a data base or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Thomas H. Quinn and Michael Hennelly were the editors of this book. Christopher Simon was the designer. Sally Fliess supervised the production. It was set in Times Roman by Achorn Graphics, Inc.

Printed and bound by R. R. Donnelley and Sons, Inc.

**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Goodlad, John I.

A place called school.

(A Study of schooling in the United States)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Public schools—United States. I. Title.

II. Series.

LA217.G654 1983

371'.01'0973

83-9859

ISBN 0-07-023626-7

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 DOC/DOC 8 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-07-023626-7

# *Acknowledgments*

Thousands of individuals and dozens of institutions were involved, directly or indirectly, from the genesis to the completion of this undertaking. Early encouragement came from H. Thomas James of The Spencer Foundation and led to a subsequent meeting with him and Edward J. Meade, Jr., Samuel J. Sava, and Gene L. Schwilck of the Ford, Kettering, and Danforth Foundations, respectively, all of which provided financial support at some stage of the inquiry. My appreciation goes not only to these four men but also to the other individuals who brought to our work their personal support and that of the institutions they then served: Geraldine Bagby of The Danforth Foundation, Sandra Kuntz of the International Paper Company Foundation, Kathleen Bloom and Jane Remer of the JDR 3rd Fund, Arthur S. Holden, Jr. of the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, the late Robert G. Chollar of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, H. Dean Evans of the Lilly Endowment, William S. White and Homer E. Dowdy of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Harold Hodgkinson and Jon Schaffarzick of the National Institute of Education, Leeda Marting of the Needmor Fund, Robert H. Anderson of Pedamorphosis, Inc., Howard Klein of The Rockefeller Foundation, and John Ellis of the United States Office of Education. My thanks go beyond the individuals named with whom we met and talked from time to time to include board members who approved our requests, staff members who managed details of the grants, and foundation representatives who consulted with us.

The Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc., formerly a division of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, received and managed the funds and provided administrative support. Samuel J. Sava, Charles L. Willis, and John M. Bahner of /I/D/E/A/ were closely associated with us from the beginning. James P. Schwartzhoff and Phillips Ruopp of the Kettering Foundation played key liaison roles. Thanks go to these five

men and several other persons, not named, who occupied staff positions with the Institute.

We spent nearly three years in conceptualizing the Study, formulating and refining questions, preparing questionnaires and observation schedules, and in other ways getting ready to gather the data. During this period and later, we visited schools and classrooms, talked with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and others, and consulted with a wide range of specialists in seeking to refine our approach to studying schools and classrooms. I cannot name all the people who assisted but can, here, express my gratitude to them. A major revision in the procedures and instruments emerged from testing them in the Riverside City Unified School District of Southern California. I thank Superintendent E. Raymond Berry and all those associated with the three schools opened up to us for this critical stage in our work. The data gathered are not included in the summaries and interpretations.

It is impossible to list the names of the thousands of persons in the schools and school districts who approved or participated in the data collections. But even if I could, I would not because we pledged to them complete confidentiality. Their communities and schools carry fictitious names in our records and manuscripts. Administrators, teachers, students, parents, and others were extraordinarily cooperative, generously giving us many hours of their time. Without their cooperation there would have been, of course, no study. We are deeply appreciative.

In almost all projects and particularly in those of considerable magnitude and complexity, one comes periodically to junctures where the best course of action is not clear or where several plausible alternatives present themselves. On such occasions it helps enormously to be able to call upon the insight of able persons who have faced somewhat similar circumstances in their own work, who are willing to take the time to become increasingly familiar with a project which they serve in an advisory capacity, and who are able to provide a fresh and objective perspective. We enjoyed the assistance of a small, multidisciplinary advisory committee of individuals who have distinguished themselves as scholars, as leaders in the improvement of educational policy and practice, or as both.

Although their names appear elsewhere in the front matter, I wish to identify them here as well and, on behalf of the professional staff and myself, acknowledge their contribution and express our appreciation of their good counsel. Ralph W. Tyler, one of the wisest of men and Director Emeritus of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, chaired the group and visited with us separately on several occasions. The Advisory Committee consisted also of Gregory Anrig, then Commis-

sioner of Education for the State of Massachusetts and now President of Educational Testing Service; the late Stephen K. Bailey, political scientist and policy analyst, who at the time of his death was professor of education and associate dean of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education; Lawrence A. Cremin, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian of education and President of Teachers College, Columbia University; Robert K. Merton, Giddings Professor of Sociology (now emeritus), Columbia University; and Arthur Jefferson, General Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools. Tyler, Cremin, and Bailey, in that order, served as the first three presidents of the National Academy of Education. Sel-don has so wide a range of expertise been represented in so small a group.

How does one thank all those who carried the work load, especially the members of the nuclear group who shared with me both the good and especially the difficult times over so many years? Several kinds of problems were so persistent as to be virtually chronic: initial and continuing criticism of our general approach which broke rather sharply with conventional procedures of the time; the tension stemming from never-ending uncertainty over funds; the continuing need to seek new funders and provide progress reports to extraordinarily patient but sometimes nervous supporters; the need for key staff members to become job-seekers when it often appeared likely that money to support them was not to be forthcoming. On occasion, we negotiated reduced time commitments, including a pay-year of only 10 or 11 rather than 12 months—which usually meant a cut in pay but no cut in work. Only the word “commitment” explains why individuals who might easily have gone elsewhere stayed on when money for their salaries was not in sight.

Appendix B provides a personnel roster and the rationale for not including some persons who were employed for only short periods or small amounts of time. I have expressed my personal appreciation orally or in writing or both to many on the list. I do so again. And to all those on and off the list to whom I have not previously expressed thanks, I do so now. I would like to do this by name, one by one, but this simply is not practical.

Yet, I simply cannot pass up the opportunity to single out a few who shared part of their lives with one another and with me over several years. Unlike most of those listed, they participated over all or most phases of the Study and in almost all of its aspects. Most but not all of them were employed full-time, whereas the large majority of those on the roster were part-time employees.

There was, then, a planning group always at the core of our work, making and carrying out the major decisions in collaboration with everybody else. Except for two or three who had rather fixed, continuing

assignments, these were people for all seasons, moving from task to task as the need arose. Membership in this core group shifted over the years because of the inevitable departures for other opportunities. In alphabetical order, the list of this research staff is as follows: Patricia Bauch, Barbara Benham, Paula De Fusco, Lillian Drag, Gerald Engstrom, Phillip Giesen, Paul Heckman, Frances Klein, Jerrold Novotney, Jeannie Oakes, Bette Overman, Kenneth Sirotnik, Raymond Terrell, Kenneth Tye, Charles Wall, and Joyce Wright. In addition, we benefited from the good counsel of sociologists Mary M. Bentzen and C. Wayne Gordon during the difficult early stages of conceptualizing our approach.

Among the members of this group to whom must go most of the credit are several who their colleagues would agree, I think, should be singled out for further recognition. From the beginning almost to the end, when another opportunity took him abroad, Ken Tye participated in the research while working on all aspects of the planning, relations with funding agencies, and negotiations with prospective participants in the data collection process. He and I were ably supported in administrative matters—specifically budget planning, financial accounting, and management of support staff—by Martha Twelvetree, our long-term office manager. Paula De Fusco, our quietly competent programmer, continued even after the Study was completed, putting the data bank in order for others to use.

Pat Bauch, Paul Heckman, Jeannie Oakes, Bette Overman, and Ken Sirotnik, who participated in almost everything along the way, paid the price of “being around,” mostly in other jobs, when the funds had about run out but much remained to be done. Thanks to them and to Paula, we continued to provide data and advisory services to former members of the staff writing other books and to leave behind more than 30 technical reports. They read and provided critical advice on the manuscript as each chapter appeared in draft form, often meeting with me to discuss agreements and disagreements. Always, their collective advice resulted in major revisions. Jeannie Oakes worked with me in editing successive drafts; her insightful suggestions for both substance and style are woven into the fabric of the manuscript. Pat Bauch served for several years as my research assistant, ferreting out relevant research and writing, and checking out the references which are gathered together, chapter by chapter, toward the end of the book.

Paul Heckman, in one of his many roles, smoothed the transition from our offices in West Los Angeles to the UCLA campus and subsequently provided the necessary management within the Graduate School of Education's Laboratory in School and Community Education.

If any members of this core group were perceived by their colleagues to approach the level of indispensibility, they were Bette Overman and Ken

Sirotnik. Both were there when we needed them—and when we did not but might have: gentle, hard-nosed, sensitive, always setting the standard by the demands they placed on themselves and the way they met these demands. How skillful they were in guiding me in a somewhat different direction when I was off course! How patient they were in agreeing to try to do what we were not always sure could be done! They stayed until the end even as the economy lagged and doors began to close on other opportunities. I shall be ever grateful.

In addition to those individuals who contributed to or participated in the work on which this book is based, there are several who were inadvertently caught up in it. These are my colleagues who shared the administration of the Graduate School of Education at UCLA. They shouldered the burdens during my “writing summers” and suffered—indeed, encouraged—my “writing mornings.” They apologized for taking my time, even for matters obviously requiring my attention. If they occasionally were frustrated or even annoyed with the toll the Study took, they never showed it.

Time is finite; possibilities for using it are infinite. My secretary and administrative assistant for nearly two decades, Ann Edwards, did everything that is humanly possible to assist me in setting priorities. With sensitivity, extraordinary intuition, and good judgment, she took care of whatever could be handled as well or better by her, always providing me with the information I needed both to keep informed and to make the decisions which necessarily were mine to make.

It was in the home environment that the most difficult work took place: interpreting the data, integrating the pieces into a picture of what I believe a good school and a good system of education could be, and getting the words on paper. My wife, Lynn, has created and maintained a setting where this work might proceed with minimal interruption—and maximal support—for writing evenings as well as writing mornings and writing summers—over more than 37 years. The project just completed merges in her mind, no doubt, into all those that have preceded and served to postpone that promised, chimeric summer when we would respond together to a different and, presumably, more sybaritic drummer. Next summer, maybe? . . . No, surely.

J.I.G.



# *Preface*

An intriguing thing has happened since the time my colleagues and I began the work on which this book is based. The context of widespread disaffection with schooling in the United States has shifted to one much less easily characterized. Criticism abounds, to be sure, but the indiscriminate giving of it has become less fashionable. There is even a growing mood that some schools are now beginning to improve rather than continuing to get worse. If some schools are getting better, so can others.

Criticism by those who use schools is focused less on these schools than on the system of schooling, it appears. Perhaps this is just part of the general decline of faith in our institutions and especially the bureaucratic insensitivity they are perceived to represent. The local school principal and teachers are more easily reached than are board members, the superintendent, other administrators, and supervisors in the central office. There has been some shift away from the proposition that schools are most likely to be changed by mandates and strategies emanating from Washington or state capitals.

The change in mood may stem from little more than the belief that conditions in our schools have bottomed out. The only way to go now is up. But there are some reasons to take heart. Time is giving us a more appreciative perspective on the burdens carried by schools in recent years, burdens increasingly taken in stride. Test scores are holding their own or even turning around in some states, especially at the primary level. School administrators, board members, and parent groups in some communities are becoming aware that they must join together if schools are to be improved. Recent conferences of educators, parents, and policy makers addressing issues of schooling have been both well attended and marked with a spirit of optimism. And there are signs that educational administrators, recently fully preoccupied with crises, are turning their attention increasingly to curricular and instructional reform.

While a mood of hope is welcome and long overdue, there is need for cautious realism. First, should the perceived mood grow from a stirring to a trend, we could do our schools and ourselves a disservice by leaving untouched an agenda begging attention. We might well relax in the mistaken belief that the needed improvements are in progress or even installed. The fact is, however, that we are only beginning to identify the most significant problems, some of which are deeply entrenched and virtually chronic. Sorting them out into a priority ordering and addressing them with some hope of success calls for commitment, ingenuity, and collaborations beyond anything now envisioned. It would be easy to pretend that some gains in test scores indicate that all is well or will soon be well with our schools.

Second, there are disturbing signs that even many individuals and groups who should know better have learned little about the complexities of schools and educational improvement and are comfortable with the old bromides. Simple diagnoses and correspondingly simple solutions abound. For example, just a few years ago, any serious discussion of how to improve schools as the social systems they are was aborted frequently by the explanation that "everything depends on the teacher." The conventional wisdom today in many quarters is that "everything depends on the principal."

There is sufficient truth in both statements to warrant them a hearing. It would be patently foolish to argue against the importance of teachers and principals. But to build a strategy for improvement solely on the premise that good principals produce good schools would be almost as foolish. Good principals no doubt make a difference but perhaps not enough to overcome some of the negative effects of large school size, thoughtlessly prescribed curricula, restraints imposed through collective bargaining, warring factions in the school board, teacher shortages, and on and on. Such conditions often cause good principals to leave or transfer. Perhaps this is why the most advantaged schools frequently are perceived to have good principals.

Significant educational improvement of schooling, not mere tinkering, requires that we focus on entire schools, not just teachers or principals or curricula or organization or school-community relations but all of these and more. We might begin with one or several of these but it is essential to realize that all are interconnected and that changing any one element ultimately affects the others. Consequently, it is advisable to focus on one place where all of the elements come together. This is the individual school. If we are to improve it, we must understand it. If we are to improve schooling, we must improve individual schools.

The primary purpose of what follows is to assist in this necessary understanding of the place called school. Since the schools selected for

description and analysis are only illustrative of the genre, we must not approach succeeding pages with the expectation of understanding all schools or even the school where our own children go. And, since descriptions and analyses are unavoidably incomplete and of a period in time, we must not assume that we will fully understand either the schools selected or those principals, teachers, students, and parents whose perceptions my colleagues and I sought to obtain. Yet, I am confident that readers who stay with me through the first eight chapters will understand schools and schooling much better than they do now. Further, they will be well on their way, I think, to sorting out the priorities for an agenda of school improvement.

This brings me to a second purpose: the development of such an agenda. The agenda put forward in Chapters 9 and 10 goes beyond the listing of topics to include recommendations for both the substance and the process of improvement. Readers of the preceding chapters probably will come up with many of the same topics but frequently will bring to them quite different values. Consequently, their recommendations may differ markedly from mine. But at least we will share a very similar awareness of critical issues and an understanding of their nature based on data.

This brings me to a third purpose: that of impressing on us the importance of bringing to the process of improvement data relevant to a particular school. I believe that the problems emerging in what follows are to some degree experienced by most schools. But they are not experienced similarly everywhere; indeed, the evidence suggests that schools vary widely in almost all of their characteristics. It follows, then, that no single set of recommendations applies to all schools. Yet, commissions on school reform frequently put forward recommendations as though they were equally relevant to the schools of the entire nation.

For their successful accomplishment of improvement local groups need data on their school very similar to the data presented in succeeding chapters. But most have little more than test scores and these are of little value unless *interpreted against careful estimates of expected normal performance* for this particular student body so as to reveal areas of high and low performance. Preoccupation solely with student achievement takes attention away from the current state of curricular offerings, pedagogy, student-teacher relations, school and class climate, principal-teacher relations, parental satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and a host of other highly important matters. Schools do not routinely gather such information. Until they do, improvement efforts are likely to be unfocused and, at best, only moderately successful. It is not realistic to gather for each school data as comprehensive as reported here. But persons connected with local schools, assisted by district personnel, should begin with a few

important questions, gather the relevant data, and then expand the inventory over a period of years.

This book reports the findings of an inquiry entitled *A Study of Schooling*. Chapter 1 serves essentially as an introduction to the Study as well as to succeeding chapters: its genesis and procedures; the sample of communities, schools, and groups studied; the themes emerging from the data around which most of the ensuing discussion is organized; and so on.

However, this is not a research report as such. It is a discussion of what appears to be the current state of schooling in our country, made real by the illustrative use of data carefully gathered from a small, diverse sample of schools. Small though the sample necessarily is, it is one of the largest studied in such detail. The data bank now organized for the use of interested researchers is, so far as I know, the largest of its kind ever assembled. To present these data voluminously and leave them to speak for themselves, however, would turn off all but a few readers and serve only limited purposes.

Consequently, I have endeavored not only to be highly selective but, also, to pull together related chunks of data so as to create generalizations. Then, as these are related one to another, a cumulative picture begins to emerge. The earlier pictures are of the pieces: goals, teaching, curricula, grouping practices, and the like. The pieces ultimately add up to whole schools—schools having an array of characteristics in common and yet which differ markedly in their individual manifestations of almost all characteristics. Much of what emerged could have been predicted but there are surprises, too.

As I sift through the data and sort out the pieces, I endeavor to interpret my growing understanding against a background of related knowledge and my own experiences in and around schools. These include teaching in a one-room rural school and several larger schools, serving as a school principal, supervising student teachers, assisting teachers in their tasks of improving schools and classrooms, systematically studying aspects of school life, and visiting schools in this country and abroad. Frequently, I draw upon related research in seeking to draw conclusions and suggest implications. I chose deliberately to select only representative studies and papers, however, in the hope of holding the reader's attention to the narrative. References are listed at the end of the book rather than after each chapter.

Although I endeavor to keep the number of references to a minimum, this does not mean that these were the only ones consulted. In the course of our work, my colleagues and I reviewed the literature relevant to the particular topic or theme addressed. We made no attempt to compile a list of references but many of our technical reports contain selected bibliog-

raphies. Few studies of schools are reported simply because few have been conducted.

In writing, I have tried to find a middle road between a research report, on one hand, and still another popularized critique of schools, on the other. I seek to reach an audience of persons seriously interested in knowing more about schools and improving them: school board members, legislators, teachers, administrators, teachers of teachers, members of state and local education commissions, national panels, and parents and other citizens seeking a broader canvas than the one on which their own experiences are reflected. Persons seeking "a quick fix" will be bored and, at best, will flip the pages in search of a laundry list of recommendations. I have avoided such. There are recommendations, but they are scattered through most chapters until assembled and expanded in Chapters 9 and 10. But, even here, they are presented in inter-related clusters and not in serial order, each separated from the rest.

Some researchers who choose to read the book will be frustrated and perhaps even annoyed. They will find, I hope, only a few of the trappings of a research report. Some frustration will arise from the fact that it simply is impossible to report all of the data from which conclusions and implications are drawn. Some annoyance will stem from periodic difficulty, which I tried to avoid, in differentiating research findings from the context of personal experience and values within which I endeavored to interpret them. There are those who will be frustrated and annoyed simultaneously by the general absence of description and discussion of the methods used at the various stages of the Study. They are directed to the technical reports, listed in numerical order in Appendix A, where some of their questions perhaps will be answered.

Had I known at the outset how long it would take to bring this Study to the writing stage, how difficult it would prove to be, how much it would cost, how many people would come to be involved, and how often I would be forced to put off other things I very much wanted to do, I probably would not have begun. As a student, I read about "delayed gratification" in psychology texts; in this inquiry I found out what it is.

With the concluding words being written and the manuscript going to press, I begin to feel, at long last, a measure of satisfaction. But this will prove to be premature and insufficient if what has now been completed contributes little or nothing to the insights of those seeking to improve the schools we have and create the educative communities we need.

JOHN I. GOODLAD

*University of California, Los Angeles*

# *Contents*

*Acknowledgments*     *ix*

*Preface*     *xv*

**1**

Can We Have Effective Schools?     *1*

**2**

We Want It All     *33*

**3**

Beyond Academics     *61*

**4**

Inside Classrooms     *93*

**5**

Access to Knowledge     *130*

**6**

Teachers and the Circumstances of Teaching     *167*

**7**

What Schools and Classrooms Teach     *197*

**8**

The Same But Different     *246*

**9**

Improving the Schools We Have     *271*

**10**

Beyond the Schools We Have	321
Appendix A: Source Materials	362
Appendix B: Personnel Roster	367
References	369
Index	383

## CHAPTER 1

# *Can We Have Effective Schools?*

The problems confronting American schools are substantial; the resources available to them are in most instances severely limited; the stakes are high, and it is by no means preordained that all will go well for many of them in the end.

Preface to issue on *America's Schools:  
Public and Private*

*Daedalus* (Summer, 1981), p. v.

American schools are in trouble. In fact, the problems of schooling are of such crippling proportions that many schools may not survive. It is possible that our entire public education system is nearing collapse. We will continue to have schools, no doubt, but the basis of their support and their relationships to families, communities, and states could be quite different from what we have known.

To survive, an institution requires from its clients substantial faith in its usefulness and a measure of satisfaction with its performance. For our schools, this is a complex matter. The primary clients of American public schools—parents and their school-age children—have become a minority group. Declining birth rates and increased aging of our population during the 1970s increased the proportion of citizens not directly involved with the schools. And there appears to be a rather direct relationship between these changed demographics and the growing difficulty of securing tax



dollars for schools. Tax levies in several parts of the country are failing even as these words are being written. More than one district is in the process of closing down its schools. Our public system of schooling requires for its survival, to say nothing of its good health, the support of many not currently using it, and that support is in doubt.

To the extent that the attainment of a democratic society depends on the existence of schools equally accessible to everyone, we are all their clients. It is not easy, however, to convince a majority of our citizens that this relationship exists and that schools require their support because of it. It is especially difficult to convince them if they perceive the schools to be deficient in regard to their traditional functions. Unfortunately, the ability of schools to do their traditional jobs of assuring literacy and eradicating ignorance is at the center of current criticism, which is intense.

A basic premise underlying what follows is that this nation has not outgrown its need for schools. If schools should suddenly cease to exist, we would find it necessary to reinvent them. Another premise is that the schools we need now are not necessarily the schools we have known. And a third premise is that the current wave of criticism lacks the diagnosis required for the reconstruction of schooling. This criticism is in part psychologically motivated—a product of a general lack of faith in ourselves and our institutions—and is not adequately focused.

What we need, then, is a better understanding of our public schools and the specific problems that beset them. Only with this understanding can we begin to address the problems with some assurance of creating better schools. As a nation, we have a history of capitalizing on this kind of focused diagnosis and the constructive criticism emerging from it. A few initial successes would renew our sense of confidence in both ourselves and our schools. This book seeks to assist the reader in acquiring this understanding of some representative schools, an awareness of the problems they have, and a sense of priorities for school reform.

It is not the fact of recent criticism of schools that leads one to contemplate seriously the demise of the educational system. Periodically, it is more fashionable to kick the schools than to praise them, and previous attacks have produced a litany of criticism. As recently as the early 1950s, a back-to-basics movement was fueled by books with such doleful and fearsome titles as *Why Johnny Can't Read*, *Crisis in Education*, and *Educational Wastelands*. No, it is not the fact of recent criticism, but the nature and depth of the concern it reflects that raises troubling uncertainties about the future of public schooling. The attacks of the 1950s tended to be not so much against the system of schooling as on the competence of those who staff schools—and especially on the administrators and those