
Preface

Many Americans now believe that their schools should be better. Too many students leave school without mastery of the basic skills and knowledge that are critical for healthy and happy lives. The problem is especially severe for low-income and ethnic minority students who live in large cities. In the United States, only about 40% of students in urban schools score at a basic level on reading, mathematics, and science tests (Olson & Jerald, 1998). In addition, violence is an almost daily occurrence in such schools, and worn-out teachers often leave after teaching for only 2 or 3 years. Some of the most promising young teachers do not even survive the first year.

The situation usually is better in suburban schools serving middle-class communities, but even here, the picture is not bright. More students in nonurban schools manage to pass standardized tests, but only 65% score at a basic level or above on standardized tests (Olson & Jerald, 1998). Violence is less prevalent in these schools, but incidents like the one at Columbine High School in Colorado show that it does occur. Moreover, even though most students come to school and sit at their desks for most of the school day, too many of them tune out. As they pass through the system, the enthusiasm they once had for learning evaporates; they become disaffected not only from school but also from the learning process itself. Even students who emerge with strong academic records often lack basic knowledge about history, geography, and science; and they view reading, math, and writing as activities that they must do to get good grades or please adults. Few students emerge from the process of schooling with a sense that learning is intrinsically pleasurable.

A HISTORY OF REFORM EFFORTS

Dissatisfaction with the performance of our schools is not a new phenomenon. Our public education system's disappointing results have led to a constant stream of reform efforts. Almost as long as we have had universal, mandatory public education in America, we have had reformers who have

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tried to make the system work better. However, during the last 40 years, both the degree of dissatisfaction and the pace of change have increased substantially (Fullan, 1993). Two historical factors triggered this period of ferment and change. One was the launching of the first space satellite by the Soviet Union in 1958. This accomplishment, occurring in the midst of the Cold War, led many Americans to demand that the nation's schools do a better job of producing well-trained scientists and engineers so that we could win the "space race." In response, the government began to invest significant amounts of money into national curriculum reform efforts, such as the New Math (Dow, 1991; Evans, 1996; Sarason, 1996).

The other factor that shaped the reform agenda of the 1960s involved the discovery of "the other America" and the civil rights movement. A number of books written by idealistic young educators described the plight of teachers and students in inner-city schools. Many of these works also pointed to methods that are more progressive as a way of rejuvenating such schools. These works led many schools to adopt educational innovations such as the "open classroom."

Unfortunately, both personal experience and a growing body of negative research findings led many educators to question the wisdom of these reform efforts, and in the late 1970s, a new approach to reform emerged, which promised to be more successful than the earlier efforts. Known as the "effective schools" movement, it focused on the qualities of schools that, according to empirical research, predicted greater student learning.

In the early 1980s, historical events once again intruded and led to another change in course. This time, the perceived threat to the nation was economic rather than political. A deep economic recession set in during this period, and a number of reports emerged from Japan suggesting that a country we had totally defeated in war less than 30 years before had overtaken us economically. In 1983, a presidential commission concluded that a large part of the problem was due to the sorry state of our educational system. The commission issued an influential report, titled *A Nation at Risk*, which led to a variety of governmental reform efforts.

The problem with many of these reform efforts was that schools did not implement them effectively. A number of studies, books, and articles pointed to the fact that no matter how good a new educational approach might seem to the academics or policymakers who proposed it, many of those charged with implementing it failed to do so in a consistent and effective way. As a result, there was growing dissatisfaction with the highly technical, top-down approach to change that seemed to ignore the "human side" and, in doing so, ensured that "The more things changed, the more they remained the same" (Firestone & Corbett, 1988; Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999; Sarason, 1996).

In response to this growing concern with the process of change, there emerged in the mid-1980s a new movement called “restructuring,” which shifted the emphasis onto the way in which instruction is organized at the level of the school building. An important element of this new approach was to empower those at the bottom of the educational hierarchy, such as parents and teachers. “School-based management” was one of the best-known innovations to come out of this period of reform.

During the 1990s, there appeared a new approach called “whole-school reform.” As the name implies, whole-school reform calls for the entire school to become mobilized around a particular educational philosophy and model. However, unlike some earlier reform movements, an underlying premise was that no single model is best for all schools.

Whole-school reform received a boost in 1991 when the New American Schools (NAS) Development Corporation embarked on an ambitious initiative, founded on the premise that educational reform had been unsuccessful because it was based on “multiple and unconnected approaches to address each area of school” (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2003, p. xv). A better approach was for schools to “integrate research-based practices into a coherent and mutually reinforcing set of effective approaches to teaching and learning for the entire school” (Berends et al., 2003, p. xv). This premise came in part from earlier research that had identified the qualities that the most effective schools had in common (Purkey & Smith, 1983). NAS funded the development and implementation of several different designs, and these NAS-sponsored designs spread to more than 4,000 schools by 2001.

Encouraged by the NAS efforts, the U.S. Congress passed the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) Act (1998). The act targeted those schools that consistently failed to educate many of their students, and it provided the schools with financial incentives to undertake whole-school reform. Schools that qualified could receive substantial amounts of federal money to help them improve their performance. However, to receive the money, schools had to adopt a “whole-school reform model.” Schools could choose from a number of different models, but the model had to be one that had been “backed by scientifically-based research” (Traub, 2002).

By the late 1990s, various national and state educational bodies had certified as many as 30 different models (Traub, 2002). The best-known include Theodore Sizer’s Coalition of Essential Schools, Robert Slavin’s Success for All (and its expanded version, called “Roots and Wings”), and James Comer’s School Development Program. Two other popular models are Henry Levin’s Accelerated Schools approach and E. D. Hirsch Jr.’s Core Knowledge.

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There have been other reform movements along the way, such as “systemic reform” and “school-to-careers.” However, the most recent effort has once again put school reform on the national agenda. With the “No Child Left Behind Act,” passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law in 2001, we have returned to a period of increasing governmental activism. The focus once again is on accountability and results. Now, more than ever, the emphasis is on changing the organizational incentives in order to force schools to improve their teaching efforts. The goal is for children to perform better on standardized tests. The new initiative also places even greater emphasis on educational practices that have received empirical support.

Not all educational researchers, theorists, or policymakers have been enamored with the prospect of educational reform during the last 40 years. Two respected educational historians have argued that Americans tend to expect too much of their schools and of school reform. They wrote, “Sometimes preserving good practices in the face of challenges is a major achievement, and sometimes teachers have been wise to resist reforms that violated their professional judgment” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 5). They also pointed out that while “policy talk” has often been utopian, actual reforms have been “gradual and incremental” and that such “tinkering” often is more useful than more radical transformations (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, pp. 6–7).

Despite these cautions, Americans continue to seek ways of improving their schools. The rate of educational failure is too high, and the consequences of failure are too costly. When it comes to education, the status quo simply is not good enough.

THE PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Unfortunately, when it comes to educational reform, having a good model is not good enough. There are many examples in the past of effective ideas, models, and programs that have failed to live up to their potential when proponents attempted to disseminate them widely or “go to scale” (Elmore, 1996; Firestone & Corbett, 1988; Louis et al., 1999; McLaughlin, 1990; Schorr, 1997). An early example was the famous “Dewey School,” based at the University of Chicago, created and initially directed by John Dewey, the founder of Progressive Education. Available accounts suggest that this school was a model of intellectual vitality and growth for students, parents, and teachers (Mayhew & Edwards, 1966). However, when the Progressive approach spread across the country during the next 30 years, the results rarely approached those obtained by Dewey and his staff.

The problem of disseminating effective models that closely adhere to the original continues to plague reformers, and it is especially salient for whole-school reform efforts. When the RAND Corporation studied the implementation process in NAS schools, they found that there were many barriers to implementation and that implementation was uneven both across schools and within schools (Berends et al., 2003).

However, equally vexing is the problem of sustainability. Even when a new educational practice is implemented in a school with high fidelity, it rarely can be sustained for long. Often it takes only a change in the principal for the new practice to disappear, often to be replaced by a new innovation. It is not surprising that veteran educators have become so cynical about educational reform when they have seen so many “break-the-mold” innovations come and go over the years.

Although researchers have studied educational reform for decades, they have begun to look at the problem of sustainability only recently. However, they already are identifying many of the factors that are most important for sustaining new practices. They are finding that the organizational and political realities and the ways in which change agents address these realities strongly influence the long-term viability of an innovation. Potentially worthwhile educational alternatives often fail to persist because those who try to implement them are not aware of the organizational problems or the strategies that successful schools have used to overcome them (Schwabel, 2003). This book is about the factors that work for or against sustainability of school change.

THE *MICROSOCIETY*[®] PROGRAM AS AN EXEMPLAR

This book addresses the problem of sustainability by focusing on the implementation of one particular innovation: the *MicroSociety*[®] program. Educator George Richmond first developed the concept while he was teaching a fifth-grade class in Brooklyn, New York, in 1967. To engage an unruly group of students in the learning process, Richmond came up with the idea of creating a miniature society within the classroom. He reasoned that if the school’s traditional structures for imposing control over the students did not work, perhaps giving the students some freedom and responsibility could. Eventually, his classroom-based society included a bank, a government, publishing enterprises, and various businesses created and operated by the students. The students immediately became engrossed in their “micro-society,” and Richmond used the students’ experiences to bring alive their lessons in math, social studies, English, and science. Richmond eventually wrote a book on the experiment (Richmond,

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1973), and other educators began to develop their own versions of the concept. In 1981, the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, created an entire school based on the model. Today, about 200 schools across the country have adopted the program, and the government has certified the *MicroSociety* program as one of those whole-school reform models that schools may adopt as part of the Comprehensive School Reform initiative.

When I first learned about the *MicroSociety* program from my friend and colleague, Lew Gantwerk, I realized that it provided a good opportunity to study the problems associated with trying to implement and sustain promising educational models. Therefore I arranged to meet with George Richmond. Dr. Richmond and his wife,Carolynn King, formed *MicroSociety, Inc.* (MSI), a private, nonprofit organization devoted to promoting and disseminating the model. They were willing to support an independent study of the implementation process.

Eventually, I studied about a dozen different schools that had implemented the *MicroSociety* program, and I studied six of the schools in depth. (Detailed information about the research can be found in Resource A.) The schools were diverse on a number of dimensions. Some were elementary, and some were middle schools. Some were urban, and some were suburban or rural. The ethnicity, special needs, and language mix of the schools varied as well. Most important, however, some of the schools were more successful in implementing the program and sustaining it over time than were others.

By "successful," I mean the extent to which schools implemented the *MicroSociety* program as intended (sometimes referred to as the "fidelity" criterion), the extent to which the staff were committed and satisfied with it, and the extent to which the school was able to sustain the innovation over an extended period. Two of the schools selected for in-depth study met all of the criteria for success.

I spent 2 to 5 days in each school. Data came from multiple sources. In addition to individual and group interviews, I observed one or more *MicroSociety* program application sessions in each school. I also observed classrooms during periods of the day when the applications learning period of the *MicroSociety* program was not in operation, and I observed nonclassroom settings such as the cafeteria, playground, halls, media center or library, main office, and teachers' lounge. Data also came from observation of faculty planning meetings and study of archival materials (which included minutes of faculty planning meetings, principal's notes, grant proposals, newspaper articles, etc.).

In addition to studying specific schools, I also attended three of the national summer training conferences, during which I participated in several workshops and informally spoke with dozens of teachers and principals from other *MicroSociety* program schools. I also led several workshops that focused on organizational problems associated with implementation.

It should be noted that the schools I studied had created their *MicroSociety* programs with little guidance from MSI. In fact, when they were created, MSI had no staff or training model. Their main activity was to organize a summer training conference each year. Thus at most, the schools I studied had read George Richmond's book, sent some staff to the national training conference, and visited a few other *MicroSociety* programs. After I had completed my research, MSI developed a much larger and stronger organization, including a formal training program, a cadre of full-time trainers, and a wealth of training materials. Schools that have adopted the *MicroSociety* program after I completed my study typically receive much more training and other kinds of external support for their implementation efforts.

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In research of this sort, the beliefs and biases of the investigator are always an important part of the research process, and readers need to consider these when they evaluate the findings. My own views about the *MicroSociety* program changed as the study progressed. In the beginning, the *MicroSociety* program intrigued me, and it seemed to incorporate many of my own educational values. Nevertheless, I tried to retain as much of a neutral stance as possible, and I think I was initially successful in doing so. Over time, however, my views toward the program became more positive, and I became less concerned about remaining neutral toward the program itself. On the other hand, I continued to try to maintain an objective stance toward the focus of the study, which was not whether the *MicroSociety* program was worthwhile, but rather the process of trying to implement and sustain it in different schools across the country.

At this point, my view is that the *MicroSociety* program is a valuable approach to making schools more interesting and productive places for both teachers and children. However, like any innovation, achieving the full impact of the program and sustaining it over time depend on the mind-sets and skills of the educators who implement it. In addition, it is not a panacea, and it is not for everyone. For some children and teachers, other approaches may well be more appropriate.

WHAT I LEARNED: A PREVIEW

In comparing the successful cases with the less successful ones, a number of lessons about implementation emerged. Some of the findings confirmed results that have emerged in previous research on school improvement. For instance, in the most successful cases, the school and school

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system provided a more receptive context for the program. Particularly important was the organizational climate, that is, the quality of relationships among the teachers and between the teachers and the principal in the school. If mistrust and conflict characterized these relationships, then the chances of successful implementation were slim at best. Also fateful was the extent to which the new program matched the school and school district's needs and priorities.

Some of the other findings help to refine certain principles on school improvement that have become almost axiomatic. For instance, many reformers now see "teacher buy-in" as an essential condition for successful reform. Thus it is not surprising that in every school I studied, the administration gave the teachers the opportunity to decide whether the school would adopt the program. However, a careful study of how teachers participated in this decision revealed important differences in the quality of participation. In the less successful cases, teacher participation was perfunctory. Many of the teachers did not have a very good understanding of what they were voting for, and some "went along" despite incomplete information or even reservations because "the principal wanted to do it" and they figured there was no point in standing in the way. The research helped to clarify what kind of adoption process is most likely to secure an informed and genuine commitment on the part of the teachers. It provided concrete, detailed models of effective teacher participation that can serve as guides for policy and practice in the future.

A few findings were unexpected and led to new insights about the implementation process. One of the most important of these insights is that the outcome will greatly depend on how well school leaders and change agents effectively manage and understand their own emotions and those of others throughout the difficult process of change, a set of abilities known as "emotional intelligence." Although a few writers on school reform have recognized that emotion plays an important role, this study adds to our understanding of this aspect of reform by exploring how emotional intelligence influences the outcome of the change process.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This book is primarily intended for educational policymakers, administrators, and scholars (including graduate students) interested in educational reform and school change. The book also will be of interest to teachers, parents, and anyone else who is interested in learning more about the factors that influence the fate of school improvement efforts. And it will be especially interesting for those associated with more than 200 *MicroSociety* schools across the United States. The proposed book also

could be used in a number of courses, particularly those in the area of educational administration.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The first part of the book introduces the *MicroSociety* program. Chapter 1 describes what it looks like, how it works, its underlying educational philosophy and rationale, and empirical research on its impact. Chapter 2 highlights the challenges encountered by schools in trying to implement the *MicroSociety* program. These challenges include lack of teacher buy-in, excessive time and work demands, and difficulty in making links between *Micro* and the core curriculum. Managing students who act out and staff conflict are two other challenges frequently involved in implementation. All of these challenges relate to a single, underlying problem: Many teachers do not understand the real essence of the program. Effective implementation of the program requires changing the mind-set of most teachers, and this is the greatest challenge of all.

The second part of the book presents a set of guidelines that pertain to the implementation process. Although these guidelines came primarily from my research on the *MicroSociety* program, they also came from the results of other research on the sustainability of school change. As such, they can help schools achieve success in implementing any whole-school reform model.

The first set of guidelines (Chapter 3) relates to the organizational context that exists before implementation of the program. The next set (Chapter 4) relates to the way in which the principal or others introduce the program to the school. A third set of guidelines (Chapter 5) pertains to the way in which the school manages the program once it is operational. The final set of guidelines (Chapter 6) involves the role of leadership in school change efforts. (I also have summarized these practice guidelines in Resource B.)

The third part of the book illustrates how the guidelines work in practice by presenting case studies of three different *MicroSociety* programs. These three case studies help show how important the implementation guidelines are for sustaining an effective *MicroSociety* program in a school. They also help to ground those guidelines in concrete experience. Chapter 7 describes one of the most successful *MicroSociety* programs, an elementary school that has become a showplace for the *MicroSociety* program concept. Chapter 8 describes another elementary school that attempted to implement the *MicroSociety* program, but in this case, the attempt ended in failure. Chapter 9 describes a middle school that achieved great success with the program and retained it for several years. Despite the initial success, however, the school struggled with some significant barriers that

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ultimately led to the program's demise. This chapter demonstrates why sustainability is a major challenge for the *MicroSociety* program and other reforms, and it points to the guidelines that can help schools to sustain school improvement efforts.

The book ends with a look at some implications for educational policy and practice. The last chapter begins with a set of guidelines related specifically to the challenge of sustaining change in schools (as opposed to just implementing it). Then the chapter highlights two central lessons that emerged from the research and their implications for educational policy. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the role of the external environment in school change efforts, especially in light of initiatives such as the federal "No Child Left Behind" legislation.

Despite a long history of efforts to reform public education in America, the results have been disappointing. Virtually every new approach to reform has struggled with the all-too-familiar problems of implementation and sustainability. Having a good model is not enough; reformers need effective strategies for implementing the model in a way that helps it to last. This book, based on an in-depth study of one such model, suggests how educators can begin to improve the quality of our schools through more effective school change efforts.

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It is particularly difficult to acknowledge all of the individuals who helped with a project such as this book. Literally hundreds of students, teachers, administrators, and parents in dozens of schools that implemented the *MicroSociety*[®] program have made important contributions. However, a number of individuals stand out and deserve special recognition. I hope I manage to name all of them here.

When it comes to educational matters, my greatest source of inspiration since graduate school days has been Seymour B. Sarason. It was Seymour who first made me interested in all of the topics covered in this work: teaching and learning, schools as social settings, the challenges of school change and educational reform, and the importance of organizational dynamics in the change process. Most important, Seymour helped me to see that organizational change could be an object of study and that only through studying the process can we hope to improve it.

For this particular project, the first important source of help was my friend and colleague Lew Gantwerk. Lew was the one who first made me aware of the *MicroSociety* program, and he has provided endless hours of

help all along the way. His vast experience as an educator, a consultant to the *MicroSociety* program, and a psychologist have been invaluable. His compassion and friendship have been equally important.

George Richmond andCarolynn King also made an enormous contribution to this work. I am still amazed and grateful that they were willing to have a relatively unknown outsider come in and conduct an extensive study of their program's implementation. They not only allowed me complete access but also covered the costs of the research. And they were a constant source of insight and inspiration as the project developed.

Early on, I met Evans Clinchy, the consultant who was instrumental in the creation of the first schoolwide *MicroSociety* program. He filled in many gaps in the story of that first brave attempt, and he helped me to better understand the theory behind the *MicroSociety* program. For that, I am deeply grateful.

Another prominent educator whom I met as the result of this project was Roland Barth. Roland provided invaluable input on an early draft of the book, and he helped me to find the ideal publisher for it. I also appreciate his willingness to write the Foreword.

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