BOOK REVIEWS

World Class Schools: International Perspectives on School Effectiveness. Edited by D. Reynolds, B. Creemers, S. Stringfield, C. Teddlie, & G. Schaffer. New York: Routledge. 2002, 302 pages.

> "School effectiveness" is a *scale* for comparative evaluation. At least three preliminary efforts were made to compare national school systems: significant factors were listed and weighed by some relevant statistics. (p. 7)

Reviewers should not complain that the concerns articulated in the books they review could be different: the choice of interests is open. Even to suggest better designs for books under review is moot. One may usually express regret, however, especially concerning the absence of a discussion on background information. Let me draw attention to this by offering a hint at what is missing in this discussion of effectiveness.

Effectiveness is highly context-dependent: means depend on ends. One end invites examination of the very best schools (p. 288); another end invites examination of schools representative of their countries or subcultures (pp. 278-279); and still another end invites measuring and raising the lowest end of the scale (p. 181) – not to mention studies of the educational level of the unschooled and of skid-row-dwellers who possess Ivy League degrees. This book, generally, compares representative schools, more effective and less (p. 19).

Many governments ban educational reform out of religious and political prejudice. This observation is totally absent here; the challenge it poses is too great. Regrettably, as a matter of course we expect religious educators to refuse to imitate secular schools as a matter of course; regrettably, too, most non-religious educators dismiss the very possibility of benefit from emulating even the best practices of some religious schools (Index Art. Religion has almost no item; see also pp. 140, 152, 217, 224-226.) This is a pity, since most educational institutions on earth are denominational. The equal education of girls should be a universal supreme end; and the first urgent need in this direction is to make co-education universal. All this is out of the scope of this book (see Chapter 2 on methodological strategy; see Index, Art. Gender).

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The book tacitly assumes that educational systems cater for the interests of their charges. This is utopian. They must weigh the needs of individual and of society (often clothed in politically correct language): a scale of school effectiveness must weigh conflicting ends. It is hard to measure. The more world-class spirits are graduates of an education system, the better. But this is not vital. Essentially it is to reduce the number of world-class wrongdoers among its graduates, and of illiterates and misanthropes. This too is beyond the scope of this book.

The book opens with reports on two past school-effectiveness studies that have found empirically the factors that raise it significantly.

First, strong headmasters. These are of diverse sorts and they serve diverse ends. In particular, two managerial ends compete for top priority: maximizing the numbers of graduates who seek further education, and minimize the members of dropouts and illiterates. (The study mentions differences in styles of teachers and their import, and even differences in styles of headmasters; but hardly any analysis.)

Second, high expectations. It matters what we expect our youths to achieve in order to have them co-operate. As the desire to achieve raises the effectiveness score, the use of coercion should lower it.

Third, an emphasis on basic skills. This is just lovely. Problems of trans-national comparability and transferability become manageable: what is basic pertains to the child's conception of economic independence later in life. Scores may improve by discussion with pupils, if teachers take them as equals (p. 222).

Fourth, a safe and orderly climate. It is a 'core factor' (p. 47), independent of many of the tests here mentioned. It is badly needed for its own worth and for its educational and political worth as well.

Fifth, frequent evaluation of pupil progress and achievement. This is important. This book has almost nothing about it, not even a discussion of the reason for its importance (see, however, pp. 114, 137, 175.) It stems from kids' desperate need to know the expectations from them. They are painfully ignorant of this (p. 189). An exception is sports; it is thus attractive (see Index, Extra-curricular activities). Kids try to learn from exam results. Classroom discussion of exams (before and after) is the best means for raising teaching effectiveness (pp. 96-97, 185). There is a snare, though: such discussion raises questions of the usefulness of the curriculum that teachers are often unable to answer – except on literacy and on vocational training.

This book's report on these factors (that raise school effectiveness) is a little different; they appear in two groups, English speakers and others (p. 258). In the English speaking systems, the relevant factors are "principal leadership, expectations from students, school goals, inter-staff relations and school image." In the other systems they are "the child's experiences, instructional style, curriculum and parental influence." Now "parental influence" is strong in all Confucian traditions, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. This naturally transpires from the detailed statistics (p. 265). (I doubt the book's comparing them with Norway is homogeneous in some sense. See pp. 289-290.)

Finally, the wealth of worthwhile evidence about the more fortunate places (North America, Northern Europe, Australia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) may come handy, even though it is not too reliable, since research difficulties are enormous. Participants deserve congratulation for their frankness on this. And the very wealth of information (interested readers are invited to request more, p. 302) imposes superficiality and reduces usefulness. Also a discussion of statistical methods is missing. (And the presentation of the statistical material here could be more reader-friendly.) The more obvious items, such as the great importance of job satisfaction, are better presented than the more intriguing ones: it is easy to overlook the fact that Norwegian schools do not grade pupils (p. 284).

The book sounds too expert, yet it takes much too little notice of even matters that concern the expert and the inexpert alike, such as severity of tests of hypotheses and inter-dependence of variables. (These two items are inter-related: do the better schools cover more of the curriculum or is this but a silly touchstone?) Repetition and improvement are desirable. This review should encourage both: as the project is commendable, its frequent repetition and improvement should be more so.

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Nicholls, G. (2002). *Developing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. London: Routledge/Falmer.

One of the more universal movements in Western higher education in recent years –although glaciers move, it should be noted – is from the