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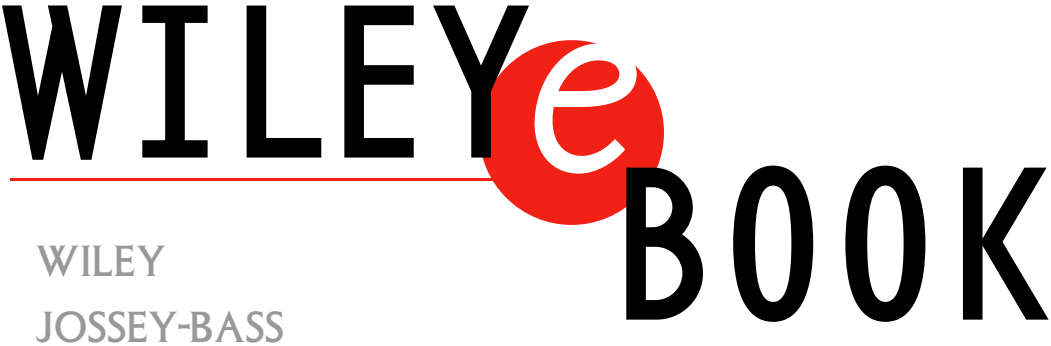


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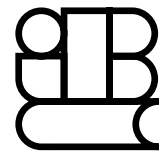

# Learning to Change

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## Teaching Beyond Subjects and Standards

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# Contents

# Preface

This book looks through teachers' eyes at what we call the new orthodoxy of educational reform and at how well it meets the complex and diverse learning needs of adolescents today. The book scrutinizes this new orthodoxy and draws on original research to get behind, go beside, and move beyond it in an effort to understand what powerful teaching and learning look like as cognitively deep, emotionally engaged, and socially rich practices. It steps into the world of exemplary teachers who work with young adolescents to see how they engage with the new educational orthodoxy; interpret, adapt, and move beyond it to make it come alive for their students; and question, challenge, and struggle with the more disturbing and impractical parts of the orthodoxy. This book also reveals how bringing this new and complex world of teaching and learning into being requires enormous dedication, demands hard intellectual work, draws deeply on reserves of emotional energy, and consumes immense amounts of time among even the very best teachers.

For the past ten years, we have each been involved in many studies of educational change, as teachers everywhere have been bombarded with demands and plans to "fix" education (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, 1996; Earl & LeMahieu, 1997; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Hargreaves, 1997b; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, & Hopkins, 1998; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000). We have spent hundreds of engrossing hours in classrooms and staff rooms, in formal interviews and casual conversations, talking with and listening to teachers of all kinds as they engage with educational change. In the opening years of a new century, the changes seem like no others in their substance or their scope.

A new orthodoxy of schooling appears to be emerging in many parts of the world, especially in the predominantly Anglophone nations. In this orthodoxy, learning is based on prescribed standards

(especially in literacy, numeracy, and science) that almost all students are expected to achieve. These standards are linked to centralized textbooks and redesigned assessments and are enforced through systems of accountability and monitoring that reward successful schools and provide support or threaten closure to those that persistently fall short.

Alongside this movement of standards-based reform is growing concern worldwide about the apparent disengagement of many young adolescents from their schooling and about the risks they increasingly encounter in their lives: drugs, family abuse or neglect, bullying, violence, suicide, alienation, consumerism, and loss of purpose and direction. The approaches that educators have devised to meet the needs of young adolescents today are sometimes in tune with the modern standards movement—in raising expectations for learning or putting consistent emphasis on getting all students to succeed. Sometimes, however, they appear to be at odds with subject-based standards—for instance, focusing on curriculum integration as a way of making learning more relevant to the different and diverse lives that young people now lead. Standards-based reform therefore appears to have an ambivalent relationship to the kinds of schooling and teaching that work best for young adolescents, especially those who are most at risk.

Over the years, much of our writing and research keeps returning to this particular group: the ones in the middle—both young adolescents and their teachers. Our own collaborative research began with this group, and we have since observed and studied them through several waves of reform as governments have changed and policies have shifted. Indeed, we are continuing to follow the paths of transition and reform in the classes of these students and their teachers (Hargreaves, 1986; Hargreaves, Leithwood, Gérin-Lajoie, Cousins, & Thiessen, 1993; Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Earl & LeMahieu, 1997; Earl & Lee, 1998; Earl & Katz, 2000).

Teachers of young adolescents do demanding, difficult, and educationally vital work. Their work and experience also open a window into the larger system. Like other teachers, especially their colleagues in the secondary years, they must respond with urgency to the new orthodoxy of standards-based reform. At the same time, dealing with the demanding learning needs, complex social worlds,

and socially toxic environments (Garbarino, 1995) of young adolescents calls for great flexibility in the curriculum so that it engages young adolescents, has meaning for them, connects with their lives, and is grounded in relationships between teachers and students in which each knows the other well. This can create problems for the standards monolith:

- Whereas standards push the curriculum toward detailed central prescription, the needs of today's diverse adolescents call for the flexibility of broader guiding frameworks.
- Whereas standards tend to emphasize common, subject-specialist knowledge, the needs of young adolescents push teachers toward a more contextualized, integrated curriculum that engages learning with young people's lives.
- Whereas standards tend to be externally imposed on teachers and students, the varying and pressing needs of young adolescents push the best teachers toward involving students in defining, interpreting, and being more involved in setting and reaching high standards of learning themselves.

This book therefore addresses some of the key issues at stake in the new orthodoxy of standards-based reform through the eyes and experiences of some of the best teachers of adolescents. In doing so, it also gets behind, moves beside, and pushes beyond the standards orthodoxy.

The study that forms the basis for this book began as a snapshot of how teachers in the middle years of grades 7 and 8 were understanding, implementing, and coping with a new curriculum policy that embraced many of the principles of standards-based reform. Yet this curriculum approached standards more openly and broadly (as outcomes) than many other current versions, so as to allow and encourage greater responsiveness among teachers to the needs of adolescents. Our conversations with these teachers have extended beyond the first two years of the project, which we report in this book. We have now been following their experiences of and responses to successive waves of reform for more than five years. We thank these teachers enormously for allowing us to glimpse their world, its frustrations and successes, and to try and represent it to a wider audience.

## Organization of the Book

The book is organized into eight chapters. Chapter One, the Introduction, sets out the framework and the central arguments for the chapters that follow. It also describes the study of twenty-nine teachers on which this book is based.

Part One comprises three chapters framed by the major reform initiatives being faced by the teachers in this study, as by many of their colleagues elsewhere. Chapter Two focuses on standards and outcomes, Chapter Three investigates new developments in classroom assessment, and Chapter Four describes the teachers' experiences with curriculum integration. In each case we offer a conceptual lens for investigating the reform and show how the teachers in this study were coming to understand it, interpret it, and integrate it into their practice.

The four chapters that make up Part Two describe what it takes to achieve deep and abiding changes in schools. Chapters Five and Six respectively address the intellectual and emotional work that teachers have to do when they are engaged in change efforts. In Chapter Seven we explore the kinds of conditions that support and sustain teachers in the midst of change. Finally, in Chapter Eight we summarize what we learned about how these dedicated teachers have gone about learning to change, and we offer suggestions for others based on what we have learned.

## Acknowledgments

Embarking on a study that includes interviews and observations and that takes place in sixteen schools in four school districts is taxing at the best of times. We could not have done it without the research officers and graduate students with whom we work at the International Centre for Educational Change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Shawn Moore and Susan Manning have made the most extensive written contributions to this book, and we are accordingly pleased to include their names as authors. Michele Schmidt, Steven Katz, Clay Lafleur, Rouleen Wignall, and Debra Wilson conducted many interviews and analyzed the data along with us, in meeting after meeting. Leo

Santos, as always, is the magician who turned our bad keyboard skills and chicken scratching into something legible, even elegant.

Our partners, Pauline Hargreaves and Bob Thede, have continued to provide immense intellectual and emotional support to us as we have each closeted ourselves away week upon week, month upon month, to pull together the manuscript for this book. As ever, we are enormously grateful for their love and patience.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada
November 2000

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*Chapter One*

# Introduction

## The New Educational Orthodoxy

A new, official orthodoxy of educational reform is rapidly being established in many parts of the world. This is occurring primarily in predominantly Anglo-Saxon countries, but through international funding organizations such as the World Bank and the global distribution of policy strategies, elements of the orthodoxy are increasingly being exported to many parts of the less-developed world as well. The new orthodoxy has the following major components:

- *High standards of learning*, which all students (excluding only those with the most severe mental dysfunctions) are expected to achieve (Tucker & Codding, 1998, 1999)
- *Deeper learning,* which moves beyond mere memorization of content to emphasize conceptual understanding, problem solving, and knowledge application, which are essential for successful participation in the new knowledge economy or knowledge society (Schlechty, 1990)
- *Centralized curriculum,* which eliminates the chaos of high school course options and ensures a common and consistent commitment to and coverage of what students should know and be able to do and which attains the high standards that are necessary in today's society
- *Literacy and numeracy,* and to a lesser extent science, which are prime targets for reform and for attaining significantly higher learning standards (Hill & Crévola, 1999)

- *Indicators and rubrics* of student achievement and curriculum planning, which enable teachers and others to be clear when standards have been achieved (or not)
- *Aligned assessments,* which are tightly linked to the prescribed curriculum, learning standards, and indicators, ensuring that teachers keep their eyes on the prize of high learning standards for all
- *Consequential accountability,* where overall school performance in terms of standard raising is closely tied to processes of accreditation, inspection, and the relationship of funding to levels of success (and failure)

This new orthodoxy consists of some fundamental and commendable shifts in educational thinking about the most specific details of classroom learning and the broadest design features of educational administration. It emphasizes high standards for almost all students, not just a few, and it drives teachers and their schools to combine excellence with equity throughout their work with students from many different backgrounds. It moves the priority in the curriculum from the convenience and conventions of what teachers teach to the quality and character of what students are expected to learn. It addresses the kinds of applied and problem-based learning that are more appropriate to an electronic, informational society than a mechanical, industrial one. By making many assessments more performance based than pencil and paper based, it tries to ensure that assessment is used as a tail to wag the new curriculum dog. Last, but not least, a national or statewide curriculum tries to ensure that irrespective of the school, its locality, its teachers, or its leadership, all students will be pushed to meet the same high standards. No one will be allowed to fall through the cracks.

In principle, these educational developments promise significant progress in educational reform in terms of improving quality and standards of learning and opportunity for all kinds of students. However, the new educational orthodoxy also misses some important dimensions of learning and teaching, and it carries within its reform package some disturbing components that threaten to undermine its more positive educational goals.

## Questioning the Orthodoxy: The Karaoke Curriculum

It is hard to question the concerted push for higher standards. Who could possibly be opposed to standards-based reform? To pronounce against standards seems tantamount to being in favor of sin. Yet there are differences between supporting the *principle* of high and inclusive educational standards and the particular *programs* of reform in which those principles are often embedded.

In reality, the new orthodoxy of educational reform represents what we call a "karaoke curriculum." The literal meaning of the Japanese word *karaoke* is "empty box." This is precisely what the new curriculum orthodoxy is—an empty box. Behind the broad advocacy for high standards, deeper learning, and more rigorous assessment, all kinds of meanings and interpretations are possible. The devil, as they say, is in the details, and the details of the particular approaches being taken to standards-based reform in many places are indeed devilish.

### The Hurried Curriculum

In his writing on the postmodern family, David Elkind (1989, 1997) has described children in contemporary society as being increasingly pushed to do more and more things earlier and faster: to engage in dating earlier; to be sexually aware earlier; to learn many things sooner; to sign on to more and more organized clubs, teams, and activities; and generally to experience a hurried, accelerated, overscheduled childhood. Moving curriculum content to earlier and earlier grades, he argues, is part of this problem and robs young people of important aspects of their childhood: to engage in innocent wonder, to play alone and with others in unstructured environments, to pursue learning that follows their own interests and curiosity, and so forth.

Writing in England after more than a decade of standards-based reform, Dadds (forthcoming) criticizes what she calls "the hurry-along curriculum," in which coverage becomes more important than learning. This curriculum, she argues, leads teachers to push

children through material without developing their understanding, it contracts the vital period of "wait-time" that good teachers allow children before they answer teachers' questions (Gutierrez, 2000), it eliminates any space for the student's voice in the learning process (Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997), and it inhibits the development of the very lifelong learning skills that standards-based reform is supposed to promote.

## The Clinical Curriculum

The common, standards-based curriculum is often, in practice, a clinical and conventional curriculum in which literacy, numeracy, and science are accorded supreme importance. Indeed, in key texts in the area, Tucker and Codding (1998, 1999) argue that these should be the fundamental areas of standards setting. The arts and social sciences, they say, should become areas to which students' fundamental learnings are then applied. This, of course, arbitrarily designates science skills as fundamental and arts skills as "applied," when the converse—in terms of artistic skills of invention and creativity, perhaps—is equally plausible. Hill and Crévola (1999) similarly argue for primacy to be given to literacy in the primary and elementary curriculum and advocate for other "clutter" (such as arts) to be removed from or reduced in the curriculum to make space for it.

In England and Wales, this familiar refrain preceded the introduction of its National Curriculum in 1988. In an earlier book, we documented how much of the derided "clutter" that made way for the staple diet of National Curriculum subjects was emotional, social, or critical in nature, such as political education, peace studies, personal and social education, and the arts—the very stuff of democratic schooling that develops critical and expressive minds (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996). Peculiarly, and perplexingly, the foundation subjects of this new National Curriculum were almost an exact replica of the secondary school curriculum first designated by law in 1907, when the policy intention had been to define a university-qualifying curriculum that excluded technical subjects that were more amenable and relevant to working-class students (Goodson, 1988).

In the United States, specification of the new learning standards has fallen very much under the purview of the national subject associations, reviving and perpetuating their influence over the school curriculum and what counts as knowledge within it. Crowded content and a brisk pace of movement through the various standards leave little space or incentive for teachers to connect learning to students' interests (Rudduck, 1991), to contextualize it and give it relevance in relation to their diverse lives (Tharp, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 1994), or to create programs of integrated and interdisciplinary study that make such deep contextualization possible. Yet Tucker and Codding (1999) dismiss the "interdisciplinary" curriculum in just one passing set of sneering quotation marks. Moreover, the overwhelmingly cognitive and clinical focus of most sets of learning standards pushes concerns for emotional learning and personal development to the periphery of teachers' classroom concerns. Yet it is precisely these kinds of curriculum experiences that are emotionally engaging for students and contextualized in their lives and are especially valuable for improving learning among minority and disadvantaged students. These students' experiences of learning and of life in their families, cultures, and communities are definitely nonstandard in nature (Cummins, 1998; Nieto, 1998). The powerful progress that can be made by basing a science curriculum for children of Mexican immigrant farmworkers around their own cultural knowledge base of agriculture, for example, finds no space within an overly standardized curriculum (Stoddart, 1999). Excessively standardized curricula connect poorly with culturally diverse societies. They do not recognize that especially in these contexts, learning is a social practice, not just an intellectual one (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In general, high-fat rather than "light" standards frameworks place too much emphasis on what Sergiovanni (2000), after Habermas (1972), calls the *systemsworld* of knowledge, cognition, technical skills, and systems. By comparison, not enough importance is accorded to the *lifeworld* of morals, values, emotional learning, and social experience. In today's complex informational society, we will be poorer democracies and weaker economies if we cannot educate students for the artistic, critical, and social-scientific lifeworld as much as for the literate, numerate, and natural-scientific systemsworld.

## Standardization and Deprofessionalization

However well founded new sets of learning standards might be, teachers become dispirited and lose their effectiveness if they feel they have no voice in the development of the standards and if standards are prescribed so tightly that they leave no real scope for teacher discretion in how they are implemented and interpreted in their own classes. So far, however, the growing evidence suggests a yawning chasm between the confidence and even grandiosity with which policymakers prescribe their master plans of standards and the confusion and disillusionment among classroom teachers who have to implement them.

In England, Marion Dadds (forthcoming) retells one teacher's perception of herself as nothing but a worker bee after teaching for more than a decade within an overly standardized system:

> They tell us to go and be busy over there, so we all swarm over there and get busy. Then they change their minds and say, "No, over there!" So we all swarm over there and get busy again in a different way. And then it's "over here," then over somewhere else. And we all keep on swarming as they point fingers in new directions. Every few years, they come to watch you to see if you're swarming properly.

In England and Wales, more than a decade of detailed curriculum prescription has left many teachers feeling deprofessionalized (Nias, 1991), less confident (Helsby, 1999), cynically compliant (Woods, Jeffrey, Troman, & Boyle, 1997), and increasingly stressed (Troman & Woods, 2000)—to the point that there is now a severe crisis of recruitment into teaching (Dean, June 30, 2000) and that sons and daughters of teachers express little interest in joining the profession (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997).

Similar teacher recruitment crises also afflict the United States, especially in urban areas (Darling-Hammond, 1997). A public (and classroom) image of teaching as highly stressed, overloaded, and increasingly subject to external regulation and control does nothing to help. Writing in a book about standards, Los Angeles teacher Myranda Marsh (1999, p. 192) fires a warning shot across