

Revolutionary and Evolutionary: The Effective Schools Movement

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Someone once said that history is our best teacher. Let's begin our journey with an overview of the Effective Schools Movement and how it has evolved over thirty-plus years.

In July 1966, "The Equal Educational Opportunity Survey" by J.S. Coleman, et al, was published. The Coleman report concluded that family background, not the school, was the major determinant of student achievement. Coleman was foremost among a group of social scientists who, during the 1960s and 70s, believed that family factors such as poverty or a parent's lack of education prevented children from learning regardless of the method of instruction. His report, along with the related literature, was the catalyst to the creation of "compensatory education" programs that dominated school improvement throughout those decades. According to Ron Edmonds, these programs, provided chiefly through Title I of the Elementary Secondary Education Act, "taught low-income children to learn in ways that conformed to most schools' preferred ways of teaching." These programs focused on changing students' behavior in order to compensate for their disadvantaged backgrounds and made no effort to change school behavior.

By lending official credence to the notion that "schools didn't make a difference" in predicting student achievement, the report stimulated a vigorous reaction, instigating many of the studies that would later come to define the research base for the Effective Schools Movement. The educational researchers who conducted these studies, myself among them, developed a body of research that supported the premise that all children can learn and that the school controls the factors necessary to assure student mastery of the core curriculum. Of course, the Effective Schools Movement did not discount the important impact of family on student learning. In 1982, Ron Edmonds published a paper entitled "Programs of School Improvement: An Overview," in which he states "while schools may be primarily responsible for whether or not students function adequately in school, the family

is probably critical in determining whether or not students flourish in school."

The first task of the effective schools researchers was to identify existing effective schools – schools that were successful in educating all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background. Examples of these especially effective schools were found repeatedly, in varying locations and in both large and small communities. After identifying these schools, the task remained to identify the common characteristics among these effective schools. In other words, what philosophies, policies, and practices did these schools have in common?

Upon closer inspection, the researchers found that all of these especially effective schools had strong instructional leadership, a strong sense of mission, demonstrated effective instructional behaviors, held high expectations for all students, practiced frequent monitoring of student achievement, and operated in a safe and orderly manner.

These attributes eventually became known as the Correlates of Effective Schools.

Edmonds first formally identified the Correlates of Effective Schools in the 1982 publication noted above. In this paper, Edmonds stated that all effective schools had:

- * "The leadership of the principal notable for substantial attention to the quality of instruction
- * A pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus
- * An orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning
- * Teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery
- * The use of measures of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation."

While Edmonds, Brookover, and Lezotte conducted the original effective schools research in elementary schools, another team of researchers in the United Kingdom was conducting similar research, only in secondary schools. Their independent research

was published in America in 1979 in the book *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (Rutter, et al, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA). The conclusions they reached about school attributes that positively affect student achievement were nearly identical to those rising out of effective schools research.

The results of the original research in the U.S. and Britain, plus the hundreds of subsequent research studies further confirming the attributes of an effective school, gives credence to this insightful assertion by Ron Edmonds:

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

We've come a long way since the Correlates were first published, and the research has continued to bear out these basic beliefs of the Effective Schools Movement:

- * All children can learn and come to school motivated to do so
- * Schools control enough of the variables to assure that virtually all students do learn
- * Schools should be held accountable for measured student achievement
- * Schools should disaggregate measured student achievement in order to be certain that students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status are successfully learning the intended school curriculum
- * The internal and external stakeholders of the individual school are the most qualified and capable people to plan and implement the changes necessary to fulfill the **Learning for All** mission

The Effective Schools Movement, its constituent research, and the Correlates themselves have not only withstood the test of time, but have also evolved and grown as our understanding of effective schools has both deepened and broadened. Over the

years, the Correlates have been refined and expanded to the following:

- * Instructional Leadership
- * Clear and Focused Mission
- * Safe and Orderly Environment
- * Climate of High Expectations
- * Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
- * Positive Home-School Relations
- * Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task

Other aspects of the Effective Schools Movement have evolved over the years as well. The early definition of effective schools rested on the concept of equity between children from differing socioeconomic classes. As educators became concerned about equity among other subsets of the population, gender, ethnicity, disabilities, and family structure were added to the mix. Furthermore, the early definition was cast in terms of mastery of essential curriculum, i.e., reading and arithmetic. Over time, other curricular outcomes were added: problem-solving ability, higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and communicative ability.

Furthermore, the early Effective Schools Movement emphasized the individual school as the unit of change. Eventually, it became clear that school improvement resulting in increased student achievement could only be sustained with strong district support.

Organizational management theories provided significant additions to effective schools research and policy. The concepts of decentralization and empowerment, the importance of organizational culture, and the principles of total quality management and continuous improvement have added important dimensions to our understanding of effective schools.

A Primer On The Correlates Of Effective Schools

The Correlates are critical to the effective school because they represent the leading organizational and contextual indicators that have been shown to influence student learning. *In other*

words, the extent to which the Correlates are in place in a school has a dramatic, positive effect on student achievement.

Furthermore, the individual Correlates are not independent of one another, but are interdependent. For example, discipline problems in the learning environment relate to the safety and orderliness of the learning environment as well as the opportunity to learn and time on task.

The following descriptions are intended to give you a basic understanding of each Correlate as it was first conceptualized. As you begin to successfully implement the Correlates, the question may arise, "What next?" At that point, you will be ready to consider and implement the Second-Generation Correlates - an even more challenging developmental stage for schools committed to the **Learning for All** mission. A description of the Second-Generation Correlates is available elsewhere. But you must walk before you run, and the original Correlates must be in place **before** your school can aspire to the next level of development.

Instructional Leadership. In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents, and students. In addition, the principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program. Clearly, the role of the principal as the articulator of the mission of the school is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the school. If you read *In Search of Excellence*, the management bible written by Tom Peters and Bob Waterman, you'll quickly discover that complex organizations, like schools, suffer from drift with respect to the core values or mission. They emphasize that it is the obligation of the leader to make sure that everyone has a shared sense of purpose, and a shared understanding of the mission and core values of the organization. Clearly, schools qualify as complex organizations that require strong leadership. The principal must fulfill this role.

Ron Edmonds often said "there may be schools out there that have strong instructional leaders, but are not yet effective; however, we have never yet found an effective school that did

not have a strong instructional leader as the principal." Simply put, the principal as a strong instructional leader is a necessary but not sufficient component of an effective school.

Clear and Focused Mission. In the effective school, there is a clearly articulated mission of the school through which the staff shares an understanding of and a commitment to the school's goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The staff in the effective school accepts responsibility for the students' learning of the essential curricular goals.

When we first started doing research on effective schools, we took as a given that schools had a shared understanding of what their mission was and ought to be. The more I work with schools, the more I become convinced that the issue of mission is one that must receive substantial discussion. When you think about all the things that might be done in the name of good education and realize the limits of your time, people power, and energy, it becomes clear that there has to be some focus to the overall effort. This idea of a shared sense of mission is one way to assure that we're all moving in the same direction. One way to ascertain whether your school has a clear focus is to ask each stakeholder "What does this school care most about?" Would you get the same answer from each individual asked, or many different answers? To the extent that there are many answers, the school would be said to lack a shared sense of mission.

Safe and Orderly Environment. In the effective school we say there is an orderly, purposeful, business-like atmosphere, which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

For many years, parents have said that the safety and disciplinary climate of the school is their first concern when judging schools. Recent shootings, bomb scares, and other senseless violent acts have only served to deepen parental concerns. We obviously want the learning environment to be a safe and secure place for its own sake.

We also want schools to be safe and secure because the presence or absence of a safe learning environment enhances or

impedes learning. Even if the environment does not sink to the level of shootings or bomb scares, the extent to which student learning is interrupted by routine disciplinary problems serves to diminish learning to some degree. Therefore, the goal of the effective school is to minimize, if not totally eliminate, such incidents.

What I have found in working with schools is that safe and orderly environment is one of the easier Correlates, or characteristics, to address in terms of school improvement if you can get certain prior conditions in place.

Two of those crucial conditions are: (1) All the adults, but most particularly teachers, must accept that they are on duty, all the time, everywhere, during school hours. If there's a place in the school or a time in the day when students perceive that there is no adult on duty, that's my nomination for a trouble spot; (2) Rules must be enforced with absolute consistency across all teachers and administrators in the school. Inconsistency will quickly undercut and destroy the orderly environment of a school. Students will be quick to pick up on inconsistent enforcement and be quick to cry "unfair." Quite frankly, they're right.

Another facet of student behavior bears on both the climate of the learning environment generally, as well as individual student learning specifically. Researchers have documented the importance of student engagement in both the teaching/learning process, as well as the social aspects of the learning environment. Student engagement is important all along the learning path, but becomes especially significant at the middle grades and secondary school levels.

Climate of High Expectations. In the effective school, there is a climate of high expectations in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of the school's essential curriculum. They also believe that they, the staff, have the capability to help all students obtain that mastery.

What are some of the important implied notions in the high expectations for success? I'd like to emphasize the words **for**

success in the description because there are an awful lot of people who believe that simply raising the standards in a school communicates higher expectations to students. Quite frankly, there is a world of difference between high standards and high expectations. High standards are those externalities that we ask students to meet, i.e., graduation requirements. An expectation is the internal belief that the adults have that the kids can and will meet those higher standards. Expectations are crucial.

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress. In the effective school, pupil progress over the essential objectives are measured frequently, monitored frequently, and the results of those assessments are used to improve the individual student behaviors and performances, as well as to improve the curriculum as a whole.

Unfortunately, the results of the assessments often do not get back to the school in time for the teacher and principal to be able to make much use of those data. I'm often asked, "How frequently should you monitor pupil progress?" The answer depends on how frequently are you prepared to adjust your instruction. If you don't ever intend to adjust instruction, then why bother monitoring at all? The only justification for monitoring without adjusting is if you perceive your mission to be that primarily of sorting and selecting students.

Positive Home-School Relations. In the effective school, parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are given opportunities to play important roles in helping the school to achieve its mission.

I think it's pretty clear that schools can be effective in having the students master the basic skills curriculum without extraordinary levels of parent involvement and support. I can also tell you that it is much easier if parents are part of the collaborative team and are seen by the school as partners in the education of their youngsters. That's a much more difficult task today because of our mobile society and the increase in two-career and single-parent families, as well as the distances some children travel to school.

Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task. In the effective school, teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential curricular areas. For a high percentage of this time, students are actively engaged in whole-class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activity.

This simply says that kids tend to learn most things that they spend time on. If you want your students to master certain curricular objectives and goals, one of the first prerequisites is to assure that they spend time on them. We see instance after instance where students are held accountable for outcomes over which they were never taught. This is patently unfair and must be changed.

Time on task implies that each of the teachers in the school has a clear understanding of what the essential learner objectives are, grade by grade and subject by subject. Once we are clear on what students should be learning, students must be given the time to learn it. This can be tricky because interruptions in the day-to-day flow of routines in the classroom and in the schools seriously and significantly detract from our ability to be effective for all of our kids.

In summary, the Correlates of Effective Schools provide school improvement teams with a comprehensive framework for identifying, categorizing, and solving the problems that schools and school districts face. And because the Correlates are based upon the documented successes of effective schools, they offer hope and inspiration to those struggling to improve. If the schools from which the Correlates are drawn can do it, **so can you!**

Suggested Readings on Effective Schools Research

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Block, James H., Susan T. Everson, and Thomas R. Guskey (Eds). *School Improvement Programs*. Scholastic Inc., New York, NY.

Brookover, Wilbur B., Fritz A. Erickson, and Alan W. McEvoy. *Creating Effective Schools: An In-service Program for Enhancing School Learning Climate and Achievement*, Revised Edition. Learning Publications, Holmes Beach, FL.

Bullard, Pamela and Barbara O. Taylor. *Keepers of the Dream: The Triumph of Effective Schools*. Excelsior! Foundation (708-295-7270).

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