

Learning to Change

Learning to Change

Teaching Beyond Subjects
and Standards

Andy Hargreaves

Lorna Earl

Shawn Moore

Susan Manning



JOSSEY-BASS
A Wiley Company
San Francisco


Copyright © 2001 by Jossey-Bass Inc., 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, California 94104.

Jossey-Bass is a registered trademark of Jossey-Bass Inc., A Wiley Company.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4744. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158-0012, (212) 850-6011, fax (212) 850-6008, e-mail: permreq@wiley.com.

Jossey-Bass books and products are available through most bookstores. To contact Jossey-Bass directly, call (888) 378-2537, fax to (800) 605-2665, or visit our website at www.josseybass.com.

Substantial discounts on bulk quantities of Jossey-Bass books are available to corporations, professional associations, and other organizations. For details and discount information, contact the special sales department at Jossey-Bass.

 Manufactured in the United States of America on Lyons Falls Turin Book. This paper is acid-free and 100 percent totally chlorine-free.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Learning to change : teaching beyond subjects and standards /

Andy Hargreaves . . . [et al.]. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (The Jossey-Bass education series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7879-5027-0 (alk. paper)

1. School improvement programs—Ontario—Case studies. 2. Curriculum change—Ontario—Case studies. 3. Middle school teaching—Ontario—

Case studies. I. Hargreaves, Andy. II. Series.

LB2822.84.C2 L42 2001

373.19'09713—dc21

00-011524

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Jossey-Bass Education Series

Contents

	Preface	xi
	The Authors	xvii
1	Introduction: The New Educational Orthodoxy	1
	Part One: The Substance of Change	15
2	Standards and Outcomes	17
3	Classroom Assessment	50
4	Curriculum Integration	83
	Part Two: The Process of Change	113
5	The Intellectual Work of Change	115
6	The Emotional Work of Change	136
7	Supporting and Sustaining Change	157
8	Conclusion: Learning to Change	183
	References	199
	Index	215

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

ANDY HARGREAVES
LORNA EARL

The Authors

ANDY HARGREAVES is professor of education in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies and codirector of the International Centre for Educational Change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. He is editor in chief of the *Journal of Educational Change* and the author and editor of many books in the field of educational change, including *Schooling for Change*, with Lorna Earl and James Ryan (1996); *Changing Teachers, Changing Times* (1994); *The Sharp Edge of Educational Change*, edited with Nina Bascia (2000); and *What's Worth Fighting for Out There?* with Michael Fullan (1998).

LORNA EARL is associate professor in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies and codirector of the International Centre for Educational Change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on large-scale educational reform, with particular attention to the role that assessment plays in school improvement. As an applied researcher and evaluator, her primary interest is the wise application of research, assessment, and evaluation knowledge to the realities of schools and classrooms. Recent publications include *Schooling for Change*, with Andy Hargreaves and James Ryan (1997); *Assessment and Accountability in Education: Improvement or Surveillance* (1999); *Developing Indicators: The Call for Accountability* (1999); *Education for the Middle Years: The Paradox of Hope* (1999); and *The Evaluation of the Manitoba School Improvement Program* (1998).

SHAWN MOORE is a senior research officer at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. He works in the International Centre for Educational Change. Currently he is

involved in two longitudinal research projects that examine how teachers frame their practice and relationships, the impact of secondary school reform on teachers' lives, the relationship of school improvement to mandated educational reforms, and the processes of change over time through teachers' eyes in different secondary school contexts.

SUSAN MANNING is a project manager in student and community services with the Toronto District School Board. She was formerly research manager with the Scarborough Board of Education. Her areas of interest include organizational behavior and development and school effectiveness and improvement initiatives.

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 & Coddling, 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 Coddling (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 Coddling (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

the bows of her more strident academic and policymaking peers when she observes that “if reform of any kind is to succeed, teachers must believe that they will have a meaningful voice in decisions and will not become the lone scapegoats of a failure to reach goals.”

Teachers, Marsh notes, resent being labeled as “resisters” simply because they adopt realistically cautious attitudes to reform. “Resistance to standards,” she says, “is not rooted in a desire to avoid accountability but rather in a fear of being out of the discussion of what constitutes success” (pp. 194). As a complement to standards, Marsh and others (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 2000) propose placing a focus on processes of teacher inquiry (especially around the meaning of performance data) and on building professional communities of practice where teachers experience the time, encouragement, and standards-based urgency of working on standards and reform together. This is an appealing combination. However, in order to link learning standards to such professional standards of collegiality and inquiry in teaching, the learning standards themselves need to leave sufficient scope for professional judgment and involvement. Moreover, sufficient levels of support and funding for teacher inquiry and collegial discussion to take place in school time are crucial. Although there are promising results in special initiatives and pilot programs that combine standards-based reform with processes of teacher inquiry, there are few signs that regular, across-the-board levels of support for such forms of improved professionalism in teaching are imminently forthcoming elsewhere.

Contradictory Contexts

Standards-based reform has not been and is not being implemented in contexts that are neutral. For one thing, levels of taxation support for public education, like public welfare and other areas of public life, remain pitifully low in many nations (Hargreaves, 2000). In his brilliant trilogy on the network society, Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) produced data to show that the state of California spends more on its prisons than its schools. The public schools in some urban areas like those in Los Angeles have been almost totally evacuated by the white population. When one of us

worked with a large group of Los Angeles urban principals recently, two-thirds of them stated that on the basis of their experience of overregulation and poor support, they would not become a principal if given the choice again.

The increasingly widespread contexts for standards-based reform are, in practice, ones of decreased resources and support for public education along with the development of quasi-market systems of school-by-school competition for students or resources, or both (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). In New Zealand, for example, the evidence is that years of such reforms have not narrowed the learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students (Wylie, 1997). In Australia, broad-based systems of support for disadvantaged schools, including assistance for schools to work with families and with students who have multiple problems, have been replaced by reform measures specifically targeted at improving literacy—as if instructional standards are unaffected by these far-reaching contextual factors (Thomson, 1999).

Meanwhile, Kentucky's much-vaunted standards-based reforms were, after a period of early success, soon stifled by excessive central control, diverted by the competing imperatives of standardized testing, and quashed by shifts of political control and focus (Whitford, 2000).

In England, the *Times Educational Supplement* regularly reports increasing rates of exclusion and suspension from school (disproportionately of working-class and cultural minority students) as schools struggle to keep their performance records rising. Moreover, increased adolescent alienation from the early years of a content-driven secondary system with its hurried curriculum is widely reported across the quasi-market systems of the Anglophone nations (Cumming, 1996). In our current projects, we are starting to see emerging evidence of this in the context of imposed standards-based reforms in Ontario, Canada, alongside reduced resources, poorer professional development support, and less time for teachers to work with colleagues or meet with students outside their classes.

Summary

The questions that need to be raised about standards-based reform are not so much ones concerning its basic and often admirable

principles: to focus on learning that benefits all students and link this to clear indicators of progress in assessment and accountability systems. The questions, rather, concern the number and range of the standards; how slanted or not they are toward utilitarian subject areas; whether they arbitrarily privilege some kinds of learning over others; and whether, as a result of all these influences, standards enhance or inhibit the prospects for deep, engaging learning among poor, disadvantaged, and minority students in particular. Standards-based reform also needs to be questioned when it is associated with lowered resources and levels of support for public education, quasi-market systems of policy that provide no evidence of narrowing the learning gap, and deprofessionalizing processes of implementation that undermine the most powerful resources we have in schools: their teachers.

Beyond Standards

How is it possible to meet the ambitions of standards-based reform without getting bogged down in its frequent, practical problems of overstandardization, underresourcing, deprofessionalization, and curricular narrowness? How can we move beyond the difficulties and drawbacks of standards programs to embrace and realize the virtues of the best standards principles?

To explore these questions and move beyond standards as they are often currently interpreted, we can learn a lot from examining reform efforts that in many places immediately preceded the “standards stampede” (Sergiovanni, 2000), that still persist as the major educational change initiatives elsewhere, and to which a number of nations, such as England and Australia, appear to be returning after years of standards fatigue. These alternative reform efforts define and interpret standards more broadly as outcomes; they include and value a wider range of the curriculum; they support curriculum integration and not just subject specialization; and they leave greater scope for teachers to exercise professional judgment and discretion. To return to this moment before standards were narrowed, tightened, made more specific and prolific, and imposed more forcefully is to recapture the principles of standards at a time and in a place where teachers were able to commit to them, make sense of them, and bring them to fruition themselves. By examining this crucial moment, we hope to rekindle debates

not only about what was worth fighting for in education before subject-specific standards, but also about what continues to be worth fighting for besides and beyond those standards.

The time and place we use for our inquiry is Ontario, Canada, in the mid-1990s. Before the election of an ultraconservative government, wide-ranging educational reform efforts in grades 7 through 9 emphasized basing the curriculum around broadly defined common learning outcomes, encouraging moves toward greater curriculum integration, implementing mandatory detracking (destreaming), and developing a related set of performance-based assessments (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1995). All of these measures were designed to create a high-quality and inclusive educational system that would retain and engage young adolescents of all backgrounds in the educational process.

Ontario's curriculum policy comprised three closely interrelated components:

- *Outcomes.* The curriculum policy specified ten very broad "Essential Outcomes," organized into four broad program areas: the arts; language; mathematics, science, and technology; and self and society. Within each of these areas, outcomes were specified as knowledge, skills, and values that students were expected to have developed at the end of grades 3, 6, and 9. There were no prescriptive guidelines for teaching and learning or curriculum delivery and no required resources. Teachers were expected to review the outcomes and plan learning activities that would enable students to achieve the outcomes.

- *Integrated curriculum.* The curriculum policy promoted integrated learning through grouping subjects into four broad program areas and explicitly encouraging teachers to make connections using four approaches to curriculum integration: parallel content across subjects, content connections across similar subjects, concept connections across several subjects, and full-scale cross-curricular connections. It mapped out the broad possibilities for integration yet provided little specific direction or incentive for teachers to overcome their reticence about integration.

- *Assessment.* The assessment role of teachers was reinforced in the curriculum. They were expected to assess progress toward the outcomes by developing curriculum, planning rubrics, identifying

indicators of reaching the outcomes, developing appropriate modifications for individual students, assessing both the process and product of learning, encouraging self-assessment, and using frequent and varied assessments. In addition, teachers were responsible for communicating the assessment changes to the parents of their students.

At the time of the study, schools in Ontario had historically experienced high status, and there had traditionally been a high commitment to public education from governments, taxpayers, and parents alike. For years, teachers had been well educated and well paid. The public seemed happy with the education their children received (Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 1998). Curriculum policy was formulated centrally by the Ministry of Education, with widespread input from educators around the province. These general guidelines were sent to schools and districts for implementation. Large school districts then wrote “second-generation” documents that translated the policy into more specific guidelines designed to suit the local district. Teachers had varying levels of support and training, depending on the resources that were available in their district for in-service training or consulting support. Assessment was exclusively in the purview of the classroom teacher. There was no province-wide program of assessment beyond sample assessments designed for curriculum review.

The Study

Our study focuses on twenty-nine teachers who were teaching in grades 7 and 8 within the context of this curriculum reform. The teachers were selected from four large school districts (over fifty thousand students each) with the assistance of the Learning Consortium, a partnership for teacher development established between the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and the four districts. Each of these districts is urban, and two of them are extremely multicultural in their student populations. The purpose of our study was to examine the understandings that teachers developed of the changes embedded in the new curriculum policy; to determine how and to what extent teachers were able to integrate the changes into their practice;

to identify what conditions, supports, and processes were necessary for them to do so; and to understand their experiences of the changes involved.

The teachers in our sample had been identified by administrators in their districts as actively engaged in efforts to incorporate the curricular changes into their practices. Two teachers in each of the schools in each of the districts were asked to allow us to visit their classrooms and interview them about their experiences as they attempted to respond to the curriculum mandates. All but three agreed to participate in the study.

The teachers were interviewed for one to two hours about their personal understanding of existing policies on curriculum integration, common learning outcomes, and assessment reform; where they had acquired this understanding; how they integrated the changes into their practices; what these practices looked like; what successes and difficulties they had encountered during their process of implementation; what professional development they had been offered or had sought out to support that implementation; and how well they felt their colleagues and their principal supported their efforts at change. More generally, we asked the teachers about their longer-term record of investment in change and about the relationship between their professional commitments and their wider life commitments and obligations. Three of the teachers allowed us to observe in their classrooms and participated in several additional interviews to give us deeper insights into their work and their experiences of educational change.

Our sample is not, of course, representative of all seventh- and eighth-grade teachers. The teachers in the study were identified precisely because they were seen to have serious and sustained commitments to implementing transition-years changes. As such, the study offers significant insights into the experiences of highly committed teachers. However, if change creates difficulties for these teachers or for the relationships that are at the heart of their work, it is likely that these difficulties will be even greater for teachers who are less open to or enthusiastic about the changes described here or indeed about educational change in general.

Our purpose, then, is to understand how change-oriented teachers make sense of required, complex educational changes, how they bring them to life or make them real in their classes, what

helps or hinders them, and what the process of change requires and demands of them.

Although reformers typically act as if change is simple for teachers—a matter of ingesting and complying with new requirements—the change situations that teachers face are highly complex. The teachers we studied were not just trying to implement single innovations, one at a time. They were facing multiple and multifaceted changes to their practice in curriculum integration, common learning outcomes, and alternative systems of assessment and reporting. Moreover, this set of changes could not be addressed in isolation from all the other aspects of their work in their schools. Some of the schools were also involved in developing cooperative learning strategies. Most were starting to come to grips with using computers and other new technologies. Building relationships with parents and establishing mandated parent councils was a parallel priority. Several of the schools' principals had just changed or were about to do so, leading to shifts in the style of leadership and in the focus for change efforts in these schools. In a deepening crisis of economic retrenchment, resources were rapidly dwindling (and continue to do so at the time of writing). There was talk, and sometimes more than talk, of class sizes increasing, courses being cut, and teachers being transferred or losing their jobs. The support of district consultants to assist teachers with change was disappearing, and professional development days had been reduced.

Through the eyes and the experience of teachers, we create and recreate a picture of how some of our best teachers make sense of and often struggle with the hard intellectual and emotional work of undertaking complex sets of educational reforms such as the ones described in this book. We portray what the emerging orthodoxy of educational change—based on what is to be learned, not what is to be taught—looks like in the finely grained texture of their classrooms. We draw on these teachers' experiences to go behind, beside, and beyond standards and examine what the new orthodoxy of educational change looks like when it includes and supports teachers and is not simply foisted on them. We show how teachers struggle to connect curriculum and assessment reforms to the diverse lives of their students, develop high-quality integrated programs that engage with the lives and learning

of all their students, and search for ways to involve students and parents more fully in the learning and assessment process.

We show how, with proper support and sufficient discretion, teachers can take great strides in making the karaoke curriculum, or new orthodoxy of educational change, work for their students—making classroom learning come alive for them. We also show where clearer definitions of outcomes of the kind incorporated into subsequent standards efforts are sorely needed, where the numbers of outcomes (like present numbers of standards) can proliferate to excess, where support can be inadequate, and where the pace of change can run too fast, even for the best teachers.

Our book, in this sense, gets inside the complexities of educational change today, as teachers experience it within the new educational orthodoxy. It will take us inside, behind, and beyond standards. Acknowledging what complex educational reform means to teachers and really asks of them is neither a cynical quest nor a celebratory one. Our findings are far from being a catalogue of tragedies—of waning enthusiasm, fading hopes, or good intentions gone awry. Nor do they portray our teachers as incurable optimists who are totally unfazed by problems or setbacks that come their way. But they do open a window into the realities and not just the rhetoric of the new educational change orthodoxy at the beginning of the century. They make the karaoke curriculum sing!