CONCEPTIONS OF CURRICULUM AND PARADIGMS FOR RESEARCH: THE CASE OF SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS STUDIES

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Changing views of the sociology of education are shaped more by changing times than by the logical march of a scientific discipline.

—*A. H. Halsey*[1]

My purpose in this article is to address some questions related to curriculum research—namely, what gets done, how it gets done, and why it gets done. The opening quotation sets the scene: in the world of science—it is supposed—questions for research result from the relentless onward march of an inquiry process that, in response to the demands of a totally internal logic, proposes, refines, and occasionally overturns its paradigms. Halsey, a sociologist of education, sees quite a different story unfolding. What sociology should be doing, he suggests, and how it does it, are matters of fashion: times change, paradigms change. We search in vain for evidence of logical progression.

Much the same could be said of curriculum research, which has consistently turned toward the social sciences to find inspiration for its inquiries. Before we have had a chance to establish reasonable answers to one set of questions, the game has moved on, and other questions—probably other researchers—have taken center stage. So, rather than trying to pretend that we are part of an endeavor of scientific problem solving that, regrettably, is sidetracked by accidents of fortune, it might be more instructive to accept Halsey's proposition, to investigate the significance of the phrase "changing times," and to speculate on how it is connected to the emergence of questions that drive research agendas. This is what I attempt here, taking as my

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[1]A. H. Halsey, "Educational Priority Areas," in *Research in the Sociology of Education,* ed. J. F. Egglestone (London: Methuen, 1974).

example studies in the area of "school effectiveness" in the post–World War II period.

THE PERSISTENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS STUDIES

The main reason for choosing effectiveness studies as my illustrative example of changing fashions in curriculum research is that the history of such studies over the post–World War II period has been almost uninterrupted, and if we wanted to, we could push it back even further. Callahan traces the rise of effectiveness research in relation to curriculum to the turn of the century, quoting an article from the *Atlantic Monthly* of 1903, which stated,

The management of school affairs is a large business involving in a city of 100,000 inhabitants an expenditure of probably $500,000 annually; the same business principles adopted in modern industry should be employed here.[2]

The principles of the time were, of course, those endorsed by contemporary industrial efficiency experts, which inspired curricular pronouncements such as that famously uttered by Frank Spaulding, superintendent of schools at Newton, Massachusetts, in 1913:

5.9 pupil-recitations in Greek are of the same value as 23.8 pupil-recitations in French. . . . I am convinced by very concrete and local considerations, that when the obligations of the present year expire, we ought to purchase no more Greek instruction at the rate of 5.9 pupil-recitations for a dollar. The price must go down, or we shall invest in something else.[3]

In 1986, a *Phi Delta Kappan* editorial bore witness to the enduring character of these themes:

The current situation is strangely familiar. Eighty years ago, during a period of feverish reform, the schools—short on resources, as always—were called on to prove their efficiency to a society dominated by the interests of business. Today, too, the key words are *effective* and *efficient*. If you doubt that, read the recommendations of the National Governors Association.[4]

And in 1989 "correlates" of effective schools gained the ultimate accolade: endorsement by the federal government through its General Accounting Office.[5]

But if the theme has been persistent, its interpretation, in terms of the research paradigms pressed into service to give it substance,

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[2] Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 6.

[3] Ibid., p. 73.

[4] Robert W. Cole Jr., "A Matter of Balance," *Phi Delta Kappan* 68 (November 1986): 186.

[5] General Accounting Office, *Effective School Programs: Their Extent and Characteristics* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989).

has been quite variable. And if this variability is not attributable to refinement of theory or to advances in research technique, how are we to explain it?

First, of course, we need a sense of history. A historical perspective is important because much of our difficulty in understanding what happens in education and in curriculum is caused by shortness of memory. As the *Phi Delta Kappan* editorialist points out, we have been here before: 90 years ago in the United States with Bobbitt, Cubberley, Snedden, and Taylor; 130 years ago in England with Robert Lowe, who said of his scheme for elementary education, "If it is not cheap, it shall be efficient; if it is not efficient, it shall be cheap."[6]

Yet sameness has often obscured difference. As we view with hindsight the course of educational policy and research in eras that are now the stuff of history, we see more clearly that times have changed and that a key element in the notion of changing times has been the shifting political and economic scene. As Callahan points out, it was inevitable that ideas of efficiency and effectiveness would touch schools and school systems, but "the *extent* of this influence was increased by the vulnerability of the leaders in the schools . . . to public opinion and pressure."[7] Thus, our efforts to understand what drives research agendas has to take account of political and economic climates as well as cultural, technical, and theoretical change.

But a mere recital of historical facts can take us only so far toward explaining the shifting scene of theory and paradigm. Also worth our attention is the fact that dominant theories and paradigms in social fields such as education and curriculum achieve their prominence because of their ability to mesh with current rhetorics of explanation and justification. Therefore we also need to examine ideas about how language functions to promote, legitimate, and restrict the operations of theory and research. Linguistic analysis offers some tools.

WHAT CAN LINGUISTICS TELL US ABOUT THE CAREERS OF RESEARCH PARADIGMS?

Theory creates (or, more modestly, proposes) meanings for words; research gives those meanings practical exemplification; and politics legitimates meaning (not necessarily in that order). This is what I shall endeavor to show as I look at the history of school effectiveness research.

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[6] S. J. Curtis and M. E. A. Boultwood, *An Introductory History of English Education Since 1800*, 4th ed. (London: University Tutorial Press, 1966), p. 71.

[7] Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 52.

My approach to linguistic analysis is based on work in literary criticism and draws upon structuralist ideas. Its central tenet is that, while words cannot be said to have absolute meaning—they are all, more or less, metaphorical—in order that meaning can be conveyed, *some* words have to be regarded as having fixed meanings that are not open to examination. As Cherryholmes explains, "Meaning, in most sign systems, is fixed by appeal to an idea or concept that transcends the sign system, thereby providing stability for its meanings."[8] That is, some words will function for language rather like points and lines in Euclidean geometry. They are the undefined axioms on which the whole logical edifice is based. The structuralist notion involved here is that of the "transcendental signified" or "transcendental semantic meaning."

Out of this play of words, certain meanings are elevated by social ideologies to a privileged position, or made the centres around which other meanings are forced to turn. Consider, in our own society, Freedom, the Family, Democracy, Independence, Authority, Order, and so on.[9]

What words, then, have operated as "transcendental signifieds" in the field of curriculum? Candidates, according to Cherryholmes, include the "Tyler Rationale," the Bloom "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives," and the "Structure of the Disciplines."[10] These were the characteristic labels of three curriculum discourses that, in the late 1950s, shaped the research agenda set in motion in the United States by the political challenge of the early successes of the Soviet space program:

Bruner drew from positivist and logical empiricist epistemology; Bloom from educational psychology (also influenced by logical empiricism); and Tyler from scientific (and efficient) management. Given the political imperatives of an internationally threatening situation the discourse was set, limited, and legitimated. For a variety of reasons, each powerful and persuasive in its own way, teaching the structure of the disciplines had become for the time being the transcendental signified for the field of curriculum. It *centred* the system; it *fixed* meaning in education.[11]

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH

Returning to the question of school effectiveness studies, what follows is an extended survey of ways in which a succession of

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[8]Cleo H. Cherryholmes, "A Social Project for Curriculum: Post-Structural Perspectives," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 19 (July–August 1987): 295–316.

[9]T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 131.

[10]Cleo H. Cherryholmes, "A Social Project for Curriculum: Post-Structural Perspectives," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 19 (July–August 1987): 299.

[11]Ibid.: 305.

dominant vocabularies of curriculum thinking has influenced this important area of curriculum research over the last four decades.

As I have suggested, theory creates meanings for words, and research gives those meanings practical exemplification. That being the case, the ability of conceptions of curriculum to inspire programs of research depends on how acceptable the meanings they propose are in particular politico-economic climates. As Cherryholmes points out, the dominating educational discourses of the 1960s were very favorable to curricular ideas that revolved around the idea of "structure of the disciplines," but less favorable, for example, to propositions about "the practical."[12] Similarly, in the case of "effectiveness" research, only certain kinds of theory offer, at any given time, vocabularies that are compatible with the current resonances of that concept.

On the face of things, the issue is about how generally *successful* school curriculums are, so that, apparently, reconceptualists could propose ways to investigate how successful they are at preserving and enhancing the dignity and self-respect of students, aesthetic humanists how successful they are in providing classroom environments pleasing to the educational critic, and so on. But "success," it seems, is ruled out as a transcendental signified precisely because, as a concept, it is far too accommodating.

"Effectiveness," on the other hand, fills the bill nicely because, while seeming to be all-embracing, its scope is, in fact, neatly delimited. It is hard to argue against making schools successful, but "successful at what?" will always be a contentious question. The beauty of introducing the word "effective" is that, while it is equally hard to argue against promoting effectiveness, the question "effective at what?" is redundant. "Effective" works well as a transcendental signified. It can fix the sign system because we all "know," at any given epoch, what "effective" means, just as we "know" what is currently meant by "democracy," "law and order," and so on. The meaning of "effective" is the one that the reigning political order imposes; "effective," whether we like it or not, means, in one way or another, effective in delivering apparently uncomplicated goals that command popular support. What is effective is not subtle or sophisticated. Cheap liquor is effective. We do not say that a good bottle of vintage claret is effective. These days, effective schools and effective curriculums are schools and curriculums that turn out students who can read, write, count, dress properly, behave themselves, and know something of the "basic subjects." This represents the currently prevalent answer

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[12]Joseph J. Schwab, "The Practical: A Language for Curriculum," *School Review* 78 (November 1969): 1–24.

to the fundamental curriculum question, "What do schools do?"[13] and this, in turn, points to the kinds of research that are thought to produce insights into the question of how effectiveness can be increased.

But if we look away from the present and consider substantial time spans, we can see that the scope and direction of effectiveness research has not remained fixed, because, in fact, the question "What do schools do?" permits a variety of answers, even if the available possibilities are restricted by the requirement that what schools do should be a response to societal demand. With these comments in mind, let us look at the history of effectiveness research since World War II.

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION "WHAT DO SCHOOLS DO?"

Schools Produce Economic Growth

In the immediate postwar years, the effectiveness of schooling was understood in terms of return on investment. That is to say, the implicit curricular theory was purposeful, social, and specific. Those were the years when the dominant social ideology was that of progressive Keynesian economists whose thinking, in the United Kingdom, lay behind the Beveridge Report of the war years and the 1944 Education Act. The field of educational theory was, in fact, practically taken over by scholars with an almost exclusive focus on economics.

One of the most prominent of these scholars of the 1950s, John Vaizey, who had strong connections with government, said,

The growth of education is . . . in part a response to the growing wealth of society. The increased production of a growing economy makes educational expansion possible by freeing resources for its use. But education is also a major cause of the growth of output. Hitherto, education has been mainly regarded as consumption. Henceforth, it is primarily to be regarded as investment.[14]

In other words, what schools did was to fuel the engine of economic growth. And, in turn, economic growth would be the source of benefits to validate the economists' claim to be socially progressive. This conception was linked to the key word "investment," which exhibits all the qualities in the role of transcendental signified that we associate with "effectiveness." It was hard to be against investment,

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[13]William A. Reid, *The Pursuit of Curriculum: Schooling and the Public Interest* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1994), p. 53 and following pages.

[14]John Vaizey and Michael Debeauvais, "Economic Aspects of Educational Development," in *Education, Economy and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Education*, ed. A. H. Halsey, Jean Floud, and C. Arnold Anderson (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 39–40.

and it did not need definition. Education (or housing, or health, or what you will) was about investment—in people, in prosperity, and so on. An effective school (or, more likely, schooling system), then, was one that produced greater economic returns through greater investment. Such an interpretation was well suited to the climate of the 1950s and early 1960s, when many nations had surplus income, and investment could be the name of the political game.

The main object of the effectiveness research of the time—much of it carried out at an international level and typically based on data collected for other purposes by government census and official statistics bureaus—was to demonstrate relationships between investment in education and economic indicators such as gross national product (GNP). As evidence accumulated that the relationships researchers were looking for could indeed be found, questions of the nature of the curriculum could be largely put to one side. Schooling was self-evidently successful, so the issue was not about the nature of schooling, but its quantity. More was better. Schooling systems were treated as "black boxes," and little effort was devoted to trying to find out why inputs of investment were related to economically and socially desirable outputs—if indeed such relationships existed in the real world as opposed to the researchers' models (and this, in the absence of some causal theory, always had to be a matter of doubt).

In fact, with hindsight, one cannot help wondering whether talk of investment did not cover up what was essentially consumption. Education, at that time, was something on which extra resources generated by rising levels of economic activity could legitimately be spent in a society not yet ready for rampant and overt consumerism. Clearly, however, research and policy had to be overtly driven by the responsible vocabulary of investment, which remained dominant through most of the 1960s. Even studies with an overtly curricular focus, such as those initiated by the International Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) were in practice preoccupied with questions of investment, conceptualized in input/output terms. "Time on task," which emerged in their studies as the most critical variable affecting achievement, represented achievement as something to be bought by greater input of resources.[15]

The standard text of this epoch of effectiveness research was Halsey, Floud, and Anderson's *Education, Economy and Society.*[16]

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[15]For the basic model behind the idea of "time on task," see John B. Carroll, "A Model of School Learning," *Teachers College Record* 64 (May 1963): 723–733.

[16]A. H. Halsey, Jean Floud, and C. Arnold Anderson, eds., *Education, Economy and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Education* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

The scope of this volume was wide. As well as reporting on questions of return on investment, it also investigated a range of issues peripheral to curriculum, such as selection processes, schooling as a social phenomenon, and the role of the teacher.

An example of a curriculum-related study of the time is Brunner and Wayland's discussion of "Occupation and Education."[17] Their principal source of data was the 1950 U.S. census, and they compiled tables to show that, generally speaking, there is a relationship between median years of schooling and major occupational groupings. Their main conclusion was that "[f]or any given age level, the median level of educational attainment for the employed is higher than that for the unemployed." One group for which this was not true was the "non-white" population, provoking this interesting comment: "It can be hypothesized that the social structure . . . did not have available for the non-whites as many positions requiring above average educational attainment as there were non-whites to fill them."[18]

This typified the "nonproblematic" stance of the research paradigms of the time toward social processes such as schooling and recruitment for employment. The system was taken as a given, and gross, bureaucratically collected statistics were used to chart flows and correlates of flows within it. Thus curriculum was conceived of as simply what fills "years of schooling," and the measurement of effectiveness was the delivery of an ever increasing median number of years. This, of course, was a conception well matched to an era of apparently ever expanding resources.

Schools Produce Equality

In the early 1970s, however, *Education, Economy and Society* was supplanted as the key text in the sociology of education by *Knowledge and Control,* which replaced the language of investment with the language of equality and social justice.[19] The language of investment did not, however, die away simply because sociologists of education rejected pure economics in favor of neo-Marxism and reproductionism. It was rather because a dramatic shift had taken

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[17]Edmund deS. Brunner and Sloan Wayland, "Occupation and Education," in *Education, Economy and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Education,* ed. A. H. Halsey, Jean Floud, and C. Arnold Anderson (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 55–67.

[18]Ibid., p. 56.

[19]M. F. D. Young, ed., *Knowledge and Control* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1971). It is interesting to note that Basil Bernstein was the only sociologist of education to have papers in both *Education, Economy and Society* and *Knowledge and Control.*

place in political priorities. In other words, the commonly accepted answer to the question "What do schools do?" had changed.

In England in 1964, 13 years of conservative rule came to an end; and in the United States, 1960 marked the close of the Eisenhower era, which was to be followed by the Democratic presidencies of Kennedy and Johnson. At the risk of gross oversimplification, it could be said that these events marked the watershed between the time when political action could be satisfied by the achievement of greater investment and greater economic growth, and the time when absence of hard evidence that this had indeed led to socially progressive outcomes pushed questions of justice and equality to the top of the political agenda. The resources were still there—or seemed to be— but using them effectively was coming to mean treating schools as places where social progress should be seen to be occurring, rather than places where investment would be translated into improved economic indicators that might, somewhere down the line, lead to a more just society. By the late 1960s, questions of social justice had become the main driving force behind effectiveness studies, and researchers were beginning to pay closer attention to what actually went on in schools and classrooms.

In the United States, researchers turned their attention to projects such as the evaluation of Headstart programs. The new priority was to understand how remedial curriculums aimed at raising the achieve- ment of deprived inner-city children could deliver on their goals. In the United Kingdom, Educational Priority Areas (EPAs) were set up, and the comprehensive schools movement accelerated, inspiring its own effectiveness studies of the type carried out by Julienne Ford for the National Foundation for Educational Research.[20] Effective school programs were now those that equalized opportunity, ironed out social class differences, and kept inner-city children in education.

The notion of investment was not completely dead. One way of representing the new initiatives was to claim that they tapped pre- viously neglected sources of talent to bolster the economic indicators. But investment no longer held center stage. It had given way to a new transcendental signified: equality. This too had the right credentials for the job. Like investment, it was something we could all support; like investment, it suggested a fixity of meaning that masked a host of unexamined assumptions. In practice, however, it proved to be more than a little fragile. Whereas "effectiveness" translated as "investment" supported research programs that dealt in abstract data garnered from

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[20]Julienne Ford, *Social Class and the Comprehensive School* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

whole school systems or whole countries, "effectiveness" in the guise of "equality" was almost inevitably driven to look at specific children enrolled in specific programs.

One of the most widely cited studies of the time was Nell Keddie's "Classroom Knowledge."[21] It reported research data "collected by observation, tape recording and questionnaire" in a large London comprehensive school, and focused on a humanities course taught to 4th year (9th grade) students.[22] Keddie saw curriculum as something constructed by the interaction of students, teachers, and milieus, rather than some kind of "years of schooling" conveyor belt that you can step on and off. Schools, Keddie claimed, accredit "as successful to the outside world those who can master subjects," but mastering of subjects depends on the degree to which the student identifies with the normative order established by the school.[23]

Effectiveness, then, resulted from the creation of a normative order that could engage all students in a positive way and thereby tended to equalize achievement. Thus, studies of effectiveness in the promotion of equality worked with a conception of curriculum yielding data that were, on the one hand, more specific to the contexts being studied, but, by the same token, more open to critique.

The critique was not long in appearing. In 1970 Jencks and his collaborators turned the notion on its head and published *Inequality*.[24] The message of the book was simple and compelling: a review of a wide range of "equality" studies yielded the conclusion that "[i]f we could equalize everyone's total environment, test score inequality would fall by 25–40% . . . [but] . . . equalizing the quality of elementary schools would reduce cognitive inequality by 3% or less."[25] In other words, environment is all, and translation of effectiveness into equality leads into exactly the kind of morass that we would stumble into if we tried to research what was "good" or "successful." Jencks could easily make the concept of equality problematic because he could cite measures of specific schooling effects that cast doubt on the whole notion that an acceptable answer to the question "What do schools do?" was "They produce equality."

But just as in the case of investment, we have to doubt whether the intellectual power or innovative thrust of Jencks's critique was

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[21]Nell Keddie, "Classroom Knowledge," in *Knowledge and Control*, ed. M. F. D. Young (London: Collier Macmillan, 1971), pp. 133–160.

[22]Ibid., p. 133.

[23]Ibid., p. 156.

[24]Christopher Jencks, *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1972).

[25]Ibid., p. 109.

alone responsible for hastening the collapse of research driven by unproblematic understandings of equality. After all, he was simply presenting research results that were already well known. There was something in the Zeitgeist that lent extra potency to his book and led to its widespread citation. The facts were not new, but now people were ready to listen. Already, in 1972, the "Great Society" movement was running out of steam. Richard Nixon was president of the United States and Edward Heath was prime minister in the United Kingdom. This was the beginning of the new conservatism, which differed from that of the 1950s in that, on the one hand, the era of surplus resources was coming to an end, and on the other, there was less reticence about channeling what was available directly into the consumption of goods, leaving relatively less for the public sector.

Pursuit of goals of equality was scarcely imaginable in the absence of extra resources. Leveling up meant providing better schools, better materials, more teachers. Yet Jencks had, apparently, shown that the yield from this kind of investment was minuscule. Such news, against a background of talk about zero growth and cuts in educational budgets, was almost welcome. Effectiveness research, then, had to find a new operating strategy that could avoid technical pitfalls by shifting the focus back toward more global measures and could avoid political pitfalls by pointing toward policies that did not have massive resource implications.

Schools Produce Good Citizens

The new idea was to broaden the notion of effectiveness by including in it not only goals of equality, but also goals of achievement and behavior. The implied answer to the question "What do schools do?" became "They turn out good citizens." The inputs needed to produce the good citizen were defined in terms of "school ethos." Thus the appropriate unit of analysis was the school rather than groups or programs on the one hand, or whole school systems on the other.

The best-known example of research in this genre, *Fifteen Thousand Hours,* by Rutter and his associates in the United Kingdom, defined "ethos" as a composite of "reported pastoral emphasis," corporal punishment, prizes, charity contributions, late arrival in school, and so on. Outputs were broadened to include attendance, behavior, and delinquency, as well as examination results.[26] Drawing on a range

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[26]Michael Rutter, Wilbur Brookover, Charles Beady, Patricia Flood, John Schweitzer, and Joe Wisenbaker, *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). See also Wilbur B. Brookover et al., *Schools, Social Systems and Student Achievement: Schools Can Make a Difference* (New York: Praeger, 1979).

of research tools similar to that used by Keddie, Rutter and his colleagues focused on 12 schools in inner London. They concluded that schools differed substantially in their effectiveness in promoting achievement, but that this could not be attributed to physical factors, such as size, space, or age of buildings. They suggested that output differences were due to school ethos, which, they claimed, induced students to accept prevailing norms—a very different conception from Keddie's notion that the "normative order" should be adapted to the inclinations of students. The implied conception of curriculum, however, was rather similar to that deployed by Keddie, in that the active element in curriculum was seen as ethos. When this is successfully managed, learning of the regular curriculum will follow.

The shift of focus to the intermediate level of the school—as opposed to the school system or the classroom—made it more likely that cases of association between ethos and output (effectiveness) would be found. There was less chance that such potential relationships would be lost in regressions to the mean over whole school systems, or would lack significance because data were collected with the aim of discriminating between subgroups in small populations.

The legacy of this research persists and has led to a kind of orthodoxy of "effectiveness as ethos" findings summed up in five factors. The effective school has the following:

- Strong leadership
- A clear statement of aims
- Consensus on aims
- An emphasis on basic learning
- High expectations for cognitive outcomes of learning

Ethos studies did, however, attract strong academic criticism. Defects cited were (1) problems of research design and analysis, (2) implausible postulated cause-effect relationships, (3) problems of replication, and (4) use of designs that focus on "outlier" schools. But none of this did much to check the progress of the ethos study. As we moved into the high noon of neoconservatism in the Reagan and Thatcher years of the 1980s, variants of the model continued to dominate the research field. It seemed naturally adapted to accommodating the new emphases in the conservative vocabulary of effectiveness, which moved it closer to the concerns of politicians hard pressed to deliver on economic goals and determined that their pursuit depended on a renewed promotion of entrepreneurship.

Schools Produce Good Employees

Conservative administrations of the 1980s on both sides of the Atlantic brought us close to answering the question of what schools

do with statements like "Add value to students by rendering them suitable for use by employers"; and this trend has been only somewhat modified by the latest Democratic presidency in the United States. From the idea of students as agents of economic development, which informed the effectiveness research of the 1950s, we have moved to one of students as goods to be consumed by the economic process— back in almost the same place that Mr. Spaulding occupied in 1913. "The nation's schools must be transformed into high-performance organizations in their own right," says the SCANS report of 1991, "What Work Requires of Schools."[27] While nodding in the direction of the broader purposes of education ("We understand that schools do more than simply prepare people to make a living"[28]), the authors of the SCANS report leave little doubt in the reader's mind that it is attention to school ethos, understood as business ethos, that marks the way to counter the "crisis" routinely diagnosed by most officially sponsored publications since the appearance of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983.[29] Allied research, then, has to fall in with the implicit assumptions that (1) schools can be effective suppliers of skills and attitudes valued by business, and (2) they can achieve this capability through a "trans-formation" process rather than through inputs of resources.

The latest twist in the tale is that researchers are reimporting into their paradigms the activities of the classroom, though within a much more conservative and less problematic frame of reference than that deployed by their 1970s predecessors. Investigators such as Teddlie and Stringfield[30] aspire to combine the "effective schools" paradigm with the long established and psychologically based "effective teach-ing" tradition, citing evidence for "the persistence of more positive teaching behaviors within historically effective schools."[31] This marks the introduction into effectiveness studies of the notion of curriculum as the companion of instruction and the reduction of the equity issue to a "compensatory power" factor to moderate output scores, which are now termed the "quality dimension."

Two questions should be raised about this trend. First, is it coinci-dental that this new interest in effective teaching should emerge at a

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[27]Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 1991), p. vi.

[28]Ibid., p. v.

[29]U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Educa-tion, *A Nation at Risk* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

[30]C. Teddlie and S. Stringfield, *Schools Make a Difference: Lessons Learned from a 10-Year Study of School Effects* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

[31]David Reynolds, Bert P. M. Creemers, Pamela S. Nesselrodt, Eugene C. Schaffer, Sam Stringfield, and Charles Teddlier, eds., *Advances in School Effectiveness Research and Practice*, (Oxford: Pergamon 1994), p. 22.

time when administrations, frustrated by the failure of their initiatives to raise achievement, have been increasingly laying blame at the door of teachers? And might we suspect, in the increased prevalence of the word "quality," the arrival of yet another transcendental signified to anchor the field of effectiveness research? "Quality," after all, just like "investment" and "equality," comes with impressive credentials. It's another of those hard-to-argue-against words that nonetheless turns aside attempts at definition with impressive ease.

CONCLUSION

The history of effectiveness research seems to bear out Halsey's contention. The persistence or demise of research models over the last 50 or so years appears to owe relatively little to academic progress or scholarly critique. Bidwell and Meyer, for example, have challenged both production-function and ethos designs on the ground that, without justifying the assumption, researchers in these traditions treat school systems as closed, intentional organizations.[32] That is, they take it for granted that curricular effects are the result of goal-oriented decisions and practices internal to schools or school systems. Bidwell and Meyer, on the other hand, offer theory and data to suggest that effects are not necessarily internally generated or the result of specific decision making. Their proposal is to work with a model that is to some degree functional rather than intentional in character. Bidwell, for example, suggests that a school acts as an agency for schooling, which he defines as a "process that individual students experience."[33] The significance of that process—and this was Jencks's point—depends on factors external to schools: students' backgrounds, cultural traditions, and so on. His view sees schooling as action conditioned by social structure.

On purely academic and scientific grounds, the Bidwell and Meyer paradigms for effectiveness research look better than the Rutter et al. model, or the Rutter model as modified by Teddlie and Stringfield. However, the likelihood of their implementation is not great, because they grow out of a vocabulary of curriculum theory that has not, so far, received the ideological sanction accorded to that of Rutter. Rutter and the later modifications of Rutter represent curriculum as the inten-

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[32]C. Bidwell and J. D. Kasarda, "Conceptualizing and Measuring the Effects of Schooling," *American Journal of Education* 88 (October 1980): 401–430. John Meyer, "Levels of the Educational System and Schooling Effects," in *The Analysis of Educational Productivity*, vol. 2, ed. C. Bidwell and D. Wyndham (Cambridge: MA: Ballinger, 1980).

[33]C. Bidwell and J. D. Kasarda, "Conceptualizing and Measuring the Effects of Schooling," *American Journal of Education* 88 (October 1980): 402.

tional implanting of specific skills and behaviors in students, and this, of course, is entirely consonant with the latest thrust of the "reform" movement in the United States, with its calls for more hours of school- ing, more homework, and stiffer criteria for graduation. It also fits with the politically sanctioned vocabularies of government agencies in the United Kingdom that see schools as purveyors of skills, prefixed as "life-," "portable-," and so on. At the same time, the model assigns responsibility for effectiveness to individual schools and teachers who should be building "ethos," following principles of effective teaching, discouraging truancy, emphasizing basic learning, and achieving con- sensus on goals. Thus, at a stroke, the problem is defined as a school and teacher problem, and one that can be solved with minimal cost implications.

On the other hand, implementation of forms of the Bidwell model might well show up very specifically where lack of effectiveness is the result of failure to provide resources for particular groups of students, or failure to ensure that they get their share of existing resources. Meyer's model looks even more dangerous, since it explic- itly casts doubt on the whole idea of "line management" and on the notion that responsibility for what happens in schools can be pinned mainly on teachers. His curriculum theory construes content as means rather than end, and emphasizes ways in which the effectiveness of teaching is a function of the social and cultural value placed on particular programs.

As we review alternative theories of curriculum and the research paradigms they engender, and match these against the cavalcade of projects the last half century has witnessed, the correlation between scientific progress and the rise and fall, or popularity and neglect, of modes of inquiry seems tenuous at best. The tale is a cautionary one. If we are not alive to the historical picture of how and why research paradigms supersede each other, we risk buying into the "logical march" illusion and believing that our theory or method, because it is the latest, must be the best. But is it fundamentally pessimistic to conclude that theory is really a sideshow and that we indulge in delusions of grandeur, possibly dangerous ones, if we believe other- wise? I think the situation is a little better than that.

An important function of academic theory in a field where others exert implicit control over the vocabulary of practice is to keep alive as many sources and stocks of vocabulary as possible. History shows that the transcendental signifieds are vulnerable to changing times, and when the time for change comes, it matters that rich traditions of discourse should be available so that real choices exist about the new understandings that might replace the old. It is equally important, for that purpose, that higher education should resist the press to lump

such traditions, along with the schools, as something that needs to be "transformed" for the benefit of industrialists, or any other interest group that finds common cause with the latest shift of political sentiment under the banner of some convenient transcendental signified.

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