Repeatedly, Americans have followed a common pattern in devising educational prescriptions for specific social or economic ills. P. 2

Faith in the power of education has had both positive and negative consequences. It has helped to persuade citizens to create the most comprehensive system of public schooling in the world. But overpromising has often led to disillusionment and to blaming the schools for not solving problems beyond their reach.

More important, the utopian tradition of social reform through schooling has often diverted attention from more costly, politically controversial, and difficult societal reforms. It’s easier to provide vocational education than to remedy inequities in employment and gross disparities in wealth and income.

In the last generation reforms have come thick and fast….Focusing only on change runs the danger of ignoring continuity in basic practices of schools. p.4

Change, we believe, is not synonymous with progress. Sometimes preserving good practices in the face of challenges is a major achievement, and sometimes teachers have been wise to resist reforms that violated their professional judgment. P. 5

...actual reforms have typically been gradual and incremental—tinkering with the system. ...such revisions of practice, adapted to local contexts, can substantially improve schools. Rather than seeing the hybridizing of reform ideas as a fault, we suggest it can be a virtue. Tinkering is one way of preserving what is valuable and reworking what is not.

Questions we that have intrigued us for a number of years
  o Why have Americans believed in progress in education for over a century but have come to doubt it in recent years?
  o What is the relation between policy talk, policy action, and institutional trends?
  o How have schools changed reforms as opposed to reforms changing schools?
  o What constitutes “success” in school reform? Why have some “successes” become invisible?
  o Why has the “grammar of schooling” the org. forms that govern instruction—persisted, while challenges to it have mostly been evanescent?
  o Why have outsiders’ attempts to reinvent schooling …generally been short-lived stars? P. 5
• Over long periods of time schools have remained basically similar in their core operation, so much so that these regularities have imprinted themselves on students, educators, and the public as the essential features of a “real school.”

• Educational reforms are intrinsically political in origin. Groups organize and contest with other groups in the politics of education to express their values and to secure their interests in the public schools. P. 8

• The politics of educ. has not been conducted on a level playing field. Policy elites—people who managed the economy, who had privileged access to the media and to political officials, who controlled foundations, who were educ. Leaders in the universities and in city and state superintendencies, and who redesigned and led org. of many kinds—gained a disproportionate authority over educational reform. These leaders inside and outside educ. generally shared a common vision of scientific management and a similar blueprint for reorganizing the educ. systems. P. 8

• Most Americans have been to school and know what a “real school:” is like. Congruence with that cultural template has helped maintain the legitimacy of the institution in the minds of the public. But when schooling departed too much from the consensual model of a “real school,” trouble often ensued. P. 9

• Change where it counts the most—in the daily interactions off teachers and students—is the hardest to achieve and the most important…p. 10

• An essential political task today is to renegotiate a pluralistic conception of the public good, a sense of trusteeship that preserves the best of the past while building a generous conception of a common future. P. 11 [underlining and bolding mine.

Chapter 1
Progress or Regress?

• Most influential report of 1980s—Nation at Risk—said "for the first time in the history of our country, the educ. skills of our generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents." P. 14 [However, there was no educator on this committee and they used data from test scores that could not be appropriately compared to other countries. NOTE MINE]

• Schools can easily shift from panacea to scapegoat. If schools are supposed to solve social problems and do not, then they present a ready target. P. 14 [Achievement Gap, mental health, note mine]

• During first half of 20th century chief Amer. Architects of reform were a policy elite we call administrative Progressives. These white men—few women and almost no people of color were admitted to inner circle of movers and shakes. Shared common faith in “educ. science” in lifting educ. above politics.

• They sought to expand access to educ so more young people could access public educ for longer periods of time.

• Turned idea of progress into a process of rational planning, surely not political bargaining. P 18
• Many consolidations of school districts decimated number of lay school trustees. P. 19
• Prodded by prof. orgs. Like NEA state legislatures increasingly standardized schools...to carry out model of school proposed by policy elite. State depts. Of educ. increased enormously. Regulations ballooned. P. 19
• Administrative progressives believed schools should be larger. They wanted increased access to school for young people for longer periods of time. In 1900—only half of population 5 to f19 were enrolled in school; by 1950, this was 8 in 10, by 1990—9 out of 10. Days in school grew from 99 in 1900 to 158 in 1950.

Progress for Whom?

• Altho most groups made progress, the inequalities were great for those with differences in residence, family occupation and income, race and gender and for those with physical or mental handicaps.
• Power was in hands of white, male leaders in US who tended to assume correctness of their own culture and policies. P. 2

A New Politics of Progress

• With administrative progressives who envisioned progress as result of gradual and expertly designed institutional evolution, there was little legitimate place for social conflict in this model of reform planned and executed largely from the top down.
• Leaders began to redefine what is meant by educational progress the pace of social and educ. change after Brown was entirely too rapid for many who had benefited most from the older educ. order.
• Conflicts erupted between contending groups. P. 29
• Today notion of steady improvement of schools is widely rejected, people have no trouble identifying defects, and citizens lack trust in those who would lead in education.
• Nonparents rate schools significantly lower than parents do, changing demographics help explain why public ratings of schools dropped so precipitously between 1974 and 1983. Proportion of adults who had children in school fell from 39% to 27% in those years. In addition,...media often presented very negative images and accounts of schools, and there was general decline in confidence in institutions of all kinds. P. 32.

Politics of Progress and Regress

• During Reagan and H.W. Bush, declared that the whole nation was "at risk" in international econ. Many policymakers narrowed the currency of educ. success to one main measure—test scores—and reduced schooling to a means of econ. competitiveness, both personal and national.
The most valid measure for the purpose—scores from NAEP (National Assessment of Educ. Progress)—attest to fairly level performance from 1970 to 1990. P. 34

Most common indicator to support index of decline was SAT which was designed to assess aptitude for college, not achievement in general; not intended to compare states. Number of students taking test has expanded greatly over years especially among lower socioeconomic groups and minorities.

Another indicator of supposed decline was the idea of literacy ala E.D. Hirsch "cultural literacy." [based on Western, white culture—note mine]

Yet when scholars summarize evidence on similar subjects across time and place—they typically discover little difference in students' knowledge—or "cultural literacy" then and now.

What about international comparisons? American students are still near the top 1-5 places depending on what is being compared. The most important problem is that the samples of people taking the tests have often been incomparable. P. 36

For all their defects, schools may still be the most positive influence many children encounter, given the turbulence and dysfunction in many impoverished neighborhoods. P. 37

Reflections

For all their faults, public schools remain one of our most stable and effective public institutions—indeed, given the increase in social pathologies in the society, educators have done far better in the last generation than might have been expected. At the same time, it is clear that the public schools need to do a better job of teaching students to think, not just in order to supposedly rescue an ailing economy but to serve broad civic purposes as well. P. 38

The intensity of both optimism and pessimism about the state of schooling reflects a continuing conviction that good education is critical both for the individual and for the society.

The key problem is to devise plausible policies for improvement of schooling that can command the support of a worried public and the commitment of the educators upon whom reform must rely. P. 39

Chapter 2: Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends.

Policy talk (diagnoses of problems and advocacy of solutions) cycles far more than practice in education. P.40

Next phase is educ. reform or policy action or adoption of reforms thru state legislation, school board regs, or decisions by other authorities.

Actual implementation, putting reforms into practice—another stage and slower and more complex than the first two.
Tracking Cycles of Policy Talk

• What is one to make of cyclical policy talk about education? Conversation about schools is one way Americans make sense of their lives.
• Citizens [and educators—note mine] disagreed about the collective functions of schooling. P. 43
• Periodically, however public concern about pub. educ has been so widespread and intense that it has become a national issue, publicized in media, debated by politicians and producing reform advocates who find mass audiences. [NCLB e.g. note mine] p. 43
• During any one period of reform, then, both political parties have tended to agree about what is wrong with Am. Public educ. and what to do about it. They may also have shared the same blinders about what is not on the agenda for reform. P. 44-45

The High School
• Rapid increase in students enrolled and graduating in 1900-1 in 10 aged 14 to 17 was enrolled. By 1980 9 in 10. Also increase in those graduating. P. 48
• Policymakers and reformers debated functions and character of high school.
• There continues to be a tension between one that "elevates liberty and promotes free markets" and the other that "elevates equality and promotes participatory politics." P. 54

Relation of Policy Talk to Implementation
• 3 features of reform complicate tracking how policy talk become translated into institutional trends: the time lag between advocacy and implementation; the uneven penetration of reforms in different sectors of public education; and the different impact of reforms on various social groups.
• Reforms that were structural add-ons generally did not disturb the standard operating procedures of schools, and this noninterference enhanced their chances of lasting. P. 57 They did not demand fundamental change in behavior of teachers
• Add-on reforms that were adopted and lasted tended to be noncontroversial to the lay people on school boards or in legislatures. P. 57
• Programs were likely to persist if they produced influential constituencies interested in seeing them continue. Partly this is a matter of jobs.
• Reforms also tended to persist if they were required by law and easily monitored.
• Reforms proposed and implemented by school administrators and teachers themselves to make their work easier or more efficient or to improve their professional status were likely to stick better than innovations pushed by outsiders.
Reflections

• We see history of public school reform as an interaction of long-term institutional trends, transitions in society, and policy talk.
• Rhetoric of reform has reflected tensions between democratic politics, with its insistence on access and equality, and the structuring of opportunity in a competitive market economy. P. 59
• Significant segments of the democratic polity have not been heard in the process, and sometimes even teachers were barely consulted about the changes that they were expected to bring about. [e.g. NCLB, Common Core, teacher eval system—note mine] What was not on the agenda of reform was often as important as what was debated.
• Policy elites have often dominated discussion of reform...But conversation about the purposes and character of schooling is not—and should not be—a matter for experts or visible leaders only. It is an essential way for citizens to exercise their trusteeship in preserving what is valuable in a common institution and correcting what is not. p. 59

Chapter 3
How Schools Change Reforms

• When reforms do not work out in practice as planned, people tend to give different explanations—it's the teachers, educators lack competence, etc.
• 3 criteria when people talk of “success” or “failure” in school reform: fidelity to original design, effectiveness in meeting preset outcomes; longevity.
• Fidelity to a plan without continuing attention to unintended by-products masks mistakes. P. 61
• Present outcomes—if reforms fail to produce predicted results, pessimism often ensues [all students fully educated by 2014 of NCLB e.g. ] However, some of significant dimensions, both positive and negative, may not be captured by measured outcomes [e.g. implementation of ipads note mine]
• Longevity—how useful is it? Difficult to measure longevity because things change over time. Longevity does not necessarily equate with benefits to students. P. 62
• Interactions of reforms with each other—reforms tend to accumulate, one on top of another, adding to rather than simply replacing what went before. [broccoli, fractal nature of education—note mine]
• Teachers have their own 'wisdom of practice". Reforms can be deliberately designed to be hybridized to fit local circumstances. P. 64

Interactions of Reforms with Schools

• Implementation of Kindergarten is one. It shaped the elementary classroom to be more childlike, engaging, interactive [and now pre-K will shape this even more. Note mine. P. 69]
• Junior high school—and now middle schools came about recognizing the transition needed from elementary to high school. [I believe this should be adapted even more to be more exploratory.]

Reflection
• Reformers who adopt a rational planning mode of educ. reform sometimes expect that they will improve schools if they design their policies correctly. [However, change is a fractal. Note mine]
• Innovations never enter educ institutions with the previous slate wiped clean
• Reforms have rarely replaced what is there; more commonly, they have added complexity.
• What should schools do? We have suggested treating policies as hypotheses and encouraging practitioners to create hybrids suited to their context.
• Danger here—Is accountability lessened? If teachers work collaboratively with each other and with policy advocates, sharing goals and tactics, supporting each other in assessing progress and surmounting obstacles, then such an approach to school improvement could work better than mandates from above. P. 83
• Movements to improve learning have often been based on shared general principals and flexible implementation. But it would be unwise to underestimate the force of the "pedagogical past" and difficulty of changing basic institutional forms, the grammar that organizes the central work of the school: instruction.

Chapter 4: Why the Grammar of Schooling Persists
• Basic grammar of schooling, like the shape of classrooms, has remained remarkably stable over decades. Little has changed in ways schools divide time and space, classify students and allocate them to classrooms, splinter knowledge into "subjects," and award grades and "credits" as evidence of learning. p. 85
• Grammar of schooling is product of history. Persisted in part because it enables teachers to discharge their duties in a predictable fashion and to cope with the everyday tasks that school boards, principals, and parents expected them to perform….p. 86

Creation of Enduring Institutional Forms
• Graded elementary of self-contained classroom with curriculum divided into year-long batches hard to imagine when it did not exist.
• Non-graded country school was different and based on instructional level.
• Over the years, the public came to regard distinct grades as emblematic of a "real school." p. 91

Carnegie Unit
• In 1906 president of Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Henry S. Pritchett, defined a "unit" as "a course of five periods weekly
throughout an academic year" in secondary school subjects. So firmly has this become embedded that successive attempts to dislodge it have been unsuccessful. P. 91

- Further reinforced by elite educators form Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Stanford who felt they had answers to improving education who decided what a college was and how it should be structured. They put their weight behind idea that high school subjects should be departmentalized and that education was a pyramid with universities at the top.
- The Carnegie units became tool for accrediting high schools, reinforcing this structure. Upgrading preparation for college became a way to "better high schools." P. 93
- Some reformers tried to change this to adapt schooling to students—to what they needed to learn, in ways they learned best, using time and curriculum flexibly. Teachers developed core programs that crossed departmental boundaries and varied time periods and sizes of classes. In short, the grammar of instruction became more individualized and student-centered, deemphasizing batch-processing. P. 99
- When evaluators compared college grades of graduates of the 29 schools in an Eight Year Study with matched set of graduates of more traditional secondary schools, they discovered that those from the [reformed] schools performed about as well as the latter in their courses and were more active in collegiate social, artistic, and political life. They also found that the graduates of the most progressive schools did the best in college. Chief message of experiment—"there is no single course of preparation for success in college." In theory, then, the high schools should have been free to alter the traditional departmentalization of subjects and other features of the grammar of schooling. P. 99

Reflections
- There are interlocking reasons why some reforms become so institutionalized. Political support from powerful sponsors are adept at persuading local school boards, state legislatures, state departments of education, and accrediting agencies to freeze their reforms into regulations and laws.
- Timing of reforms also crucial—to change one part, e.g. Carnegie unit, disrupted familiar external controls such as standards for college admission
- Some reforms failed because they did not build broad base of support among non-educators.
- Also, burnout occurs—changing basic organizations created overload for teachers and innovators.
- We suggest that actual changes in schools will be more gradual and piecemeal than the usual either-or rhetoric of innovation might indicate. Almost any blueprint for basic reform will be altered during implementation, so powerful is
the hold of the public's cultural construction of what constitutes a "real school" and so common is the teachers' habit of hybridizing reforms to fit local circumstances and public expectations. P. 109

• One reason that changing the grammar is difficult is that reforms in one classroom or mini-school or school or district take place within a larger interdependent system [the system is a fractal-- note mine]

• Reformers who want to change grammar of schooling today need to enlist the support of parents, school boards, and the community more generally. But in a democracy, fundamental reforms that seek to alter the cultural constructions of a "real school" cannot succeed without lengthy and searching public dialogue about the ends and means of schooling. P. 109

Chapter 5 Reinventing Schooling

• After "America 2000" many leaders thought it necessary to bypass traditional educators and ask business leaders to take the lead in transforming education.

• Chris Whittle created for-profit schools known as Edison Project.

• We looked to Total Quality Management. [Now we have Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Mrs. Steve Jobs creating educational programs—note mine]

• Outsiders are often skilled in publicity and the politics of promising and claimed to use the latest models of rational planning. P. 113

Business of Schooling

• Business-oriented reformers...had ready-made technocratic solutions to educational problems. They treat public schools as a marketplace of instructional services in which corporations could compete in teaching children by suing the latest technologies of instruction and behavioral engineering. [online schools e.g. note mine]

Managing Education

• Language and imagery of business efficiency proved useful to superintendents who needed to please local elites, but much emulation of business was rhetorical and did not directly translate into classroom practices. P. 115

• Demand for accountability and cost-effective management in public schools revived cult of efficiency...These technocratic reformers had ready-made rational solutions in search of problems, and educational system seemed to them ripe for experiment. P. 115

• MBO—Managing by objective and ZBB—Zero Based Budgeting are two examples

Teaching by Machine

• Many Americans relish technological solutions to the problems of learning.
• Many technical inventions have in fact made their way into classrooms and are now so familiar that few people even notice them. [in fact, we have created another gap in our students called "the digital divide" which further disadvantages some of our poorest students—note mine.] [We have also created another demand on our teachers for teaching technical literacy.—note mine]

• To what degree are computers/ipads etc actually employed as sophisticated teachers' aides and integrated into instruction? P. 125

Business of Teaching

• Why have so few schemes to pay teachers for their performance stuck?

• There is a different perception of sources of satisfaction between teachers and public. Teachers value most highly the intrinsic rewards of the occupation that come from seeing their pupils develop and that they treasure praise from students, parents and colleagues. Obviously, teachers care deeply about receiving adequate salaries—they rarely do==and appreciate public recognition and status. P. 131

• Rather than starting from scratch in reinventing schools, it makes most sense to us to graft thoughtful reforms onto what is healthy in the present system. Schooling is being reinvented all the time, but not necessarily in ways envisage in macro planning. Good teachers reinvent the world every day for the children in their classes. P 133

Epilogue

• Better schooling will result in the future—as it has in the past and does now—chiefly from the steady, reflective efforts of the practitioners who work in schools and from the contributions of the parents and citizens who support (while they criticize) public education.

• To the degree that teachers are out of the policy loop in designing and adopting school reform, it is not surprising if they drag their feet in implementing them.

• Reform of instruction by remote control has rarely worked well. The notion of teacher-proof instruction through technology, for example, is as foolish as student-proof learning. p. f135

• Reforms should be designed to be hybridized, adapted by educators working together to take advantage of their knowledge of their own diverse students and communities and supporting each another in new ways of teaching.

• Reform of educ. needs to be anchored in a realistic understanding of the institutional character of schools, but this alone is not enough. School reform is also a prime arena for debating the shape of the future of society which is a broad civic and moral enterprise in which all citizens are stakeholders. P. 13

• The major aim of reform is to improve learning. Here policymakers outside the schools an go only so far. P. 136
• Legislators, officials, and courts can do a great deal to equalize school finance across states and districts, establish policies of racial or gender equity, or provide added resources for children with special needs.... These are necessary but not sufficient steps in improving instruction.

• Under a hybridizing model innovation may look quite different in practice from school to school or classroom to classroom.

• With all the demands, teachers need help in adapting or developing new instructional practices. P. 138

• At its best, debate over purpose in public educ. has been a continuous process of creating and reshaping a democratic institution that, in turn, helped to create a democratic society.

• To be sure, there were elites who wanted to decree rather than debate policy. Some interest groups have focused only on their own narrow aims, seeing the politics of education as simply an arena of winners and losers.

• But to the degree that discourse about purpose in public education concerned itself with the public good, it can be understood as a kind of trusteeship, an effort to preserve the best of the past, to make wise choices in the present, and to plan for the future. P. 142