

BOOK REVIEWS

Schools Within Schools: Possibilities and Pitfalls of High School Reform

Valerie E. Lee & Douglas D. Ready
Teachers College Press, 2007
\$35.95, 211 pages

Reviewed by Chris DellaPorta

America's large high schools developed for three main reasons. Since the early 1900s, small districts have combined with one another to form larger districts with the goal of cutting costs. This has led to a reduction in the number of secondary schools. Second, immigration and population growth have led more adolescents to enter high school, and stricter state requirements cause more to stay in school. Third, many people desire large schools so that a community's diverse needs can be met under one roof. The past decade has seen the large size of public high schools criticized. Among recent reform ideas is the schools-within-schools (SWS) design.

Schools Within Schools examines successes and struggles in five schools that implemented this new reform. The book is written by Valerie E. Lee, professor of education at the University of Michigan, who has researched the social and academic organization of high schools and the effect on student learning, and Douglas D. Ready, who has studied outcomes of educational policies and practices on equity and access. Their earlier research showed the benefits of smaller high schools on student learning. Lee and Ready sought to answer the question, "How can high schools actually be made smaller?" (p. vii). At the time the authors began their research, the SWS model was not widely accepted. The key idea is that rather than building new, smaller buildings, the large troubled high schools could be divided into independent schools that share the same large building.

The authors provide enough background information that their findings are clear, even to those who do not possess firsthand knowledge and experience in how high schools function. They introduce their discussion of the SWS high schools by describing a more conventional high school so that the reader will have a basis for comparison. Lee and Ready explain that the duties of the principal and assistant principals in typical schools include "complying with federal and state policy, record-keeping, maintaining order and discipline,

and fostering positive relationships between the school and the community it serves,” while “academic leadership more commonly rests within subject-matter departments” (p. 66). Then the authors clearly show the contrast to the SWS high schools. “The organizational structures of these SWS high schools included, by design, an additional administrative layer: the subunit” (p. 66), or the small independent schools that create the SWS.

Another strength of the book is a description of general characteristics of the SWS design. “The responsibility for teaching and learning in schools resided primarily in subunits in these schools, and the subunit heads’ main job was to coordinate their instructional programs” (p. 78). In a later chapter, the process of designating students to different subunits is described thoroughly. This is helpful because it is a challenge unique to the SWS design. The authors share their concerns and advice and cite several articles on the matter. Most readers, even educators, will not have a great deal of understanding of the SWS model prior to reading this book, so these descriptions help the reader form an understanding of how these schools should operate.

While *Schools Within Schools* deals with five different high schools, its stronger sections are those that focus on a particular school. This in-depth perspective allows the reader to form a more complete understanding of the school. The reader’s attention can focus on absorbing the principles detailed as opposed to figuring out which school’s situation is being addressed. The design of *Schools Within Schools* also aims to leave the reader with a take-home message. The chapters end with concise conclusions similar to those that would be found in textbooks. The final chapter describes eight lessons and four recommendations to schools considering adoption of the SWS model.

Lee and Ready explain that they chose to analyze only five schools because they wanted to study examples of SWS that showed dedication to the design for an extended period, and there were not many that met that criterion. Unfortunately, this leads to occasional evaluations of principals on a more personal level. “Miller neither defended the school’s SWS structure to outsiders nor took a strong public stand against it. Instead he seemed to retreat from the battle, seemingly holding on until his impending retirement” (p. 76). The authors speculate as to principal Miller’s motivation and sound judgmental in their criticism. It is understandable that the authors would develop personal feelings toward these schools and administrators, but relaying them to the reader is not as helpful as focusing on the issues. At times the authors comment on three or more different schools in the same paragraph, and the quick transitions sometimes draw the reader’s attention away from the topic being discussed.

Regardless of educational expertise, readers will find *Schools Within Schools* to be comprehensible because Lee and Ready offer enough

background about typical public schools before describing what makes SWS unique. This book would be a great resource for administrators considering implementation of the SWS design. Catholic school administrators using this book should seek additional resources aimed at preserving the sense of community in their schools before adopting this design.

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How in the World Do We Make A Difference? Getting to the Heart and Soul of Love and Work

Norman Douglas, Lawrence Vuillemin, & Stephen Hallam
ACTA Publications, 2006
\$9.95, 109 pages

Reviewed by Patricia Sevilla

Frustration surrounding daily life is an obstacle every person faces at some point, and in *How in the World Do We Make a Difference?* authors Douglas, Vuillemin, and Hallam found that reflection and acceptance of God's role in life are the keys to moving past that stumbling block. The three authors come from different professions—the priesthood (Douglas), the world of law (Vuillemin), and education (Hallam), and have three different views of the world around them. Inspired by personal events and questions from friends and co-workers, their collected thoughts become a simple set of directions for helping find one's way when discerning one's place in this world. The book is not meant to give all the answers or dole out fulfillment, but to offer the reader an understanding of how to focus and evaluate the life they have. The individual gains knowledge from responding to queries posed, and applying that understanding to his or her own situations.

The creation of the book came about as a product of conversation between the three authors and is written in a style that involves the reader in that discussion. Because of the simplicity of the language and message, it is easily adaptable to a variety of audiences. Questions following each chapter promote open discussion or journal reflection. The school principal can enhance staff development with it as easily as the CEO, the pastor or ministry coor-