ABSTRACT
        Sensitivity to context variables marks the third
phase of effective schools research (ESR). The first phase was one of
explicit concern for equity, challenging the works of Coleman and
Jencks which suggested that achievement differences were more
associated with family background than school variables. This
research focused on low socioeconomic status urban schools. Phase two
was characterized by implicit concerns for efficiency. While
controlling for financial expenditures, those variables associated
with achievement outcomes were investigated. The third developmental
phase of ESR may draw on research done outside of the rubric of ESR
to understand forces present in individual classrooms, larger
organizational settings, and communities. Using a heuristic of
political economy permits researchers to examine the effect of
multiple variables on both equity and efficiency of resource
utilization and learning. (The stories of two elementary schools are
presented to illustrate possible differences in school environments.)
(MDE)

ED285909

SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT:

THE PAST AND FUTURE OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS RESEARCH

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SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT:

THE PAST AND FUTURE OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS STUDIES

Research on school effects and school effectiveness is now old
enough to have a "history," repleat with internal time demarcations. If
we take the "Coleman Report" (1966) as the first major school effects
research and as the progenitor of the school effectiveness studies to
follow, the history spans a full two decades. In this paper we focus on
the post-Coleman part of that history and the line of currently popular
inquiry most often called, "effective schools" research. We find in it
two eras divided between explicit concerns for equity, in the first
instance, and implicit concerns for efficiency, in the second. The
division between the two eras, we argue, results from the introduction
of context variables into the critique and revision of effective schools
research designs. "Context" can include socio-political facets such as
the socioeconomic background of the students, governance structures that
determine fiscal and operational decision making, grade levels (age of
students and curricular program) of the school, and more.

After discussing the substantive and thematic shifts that came with
the introduction of context in school effectiveness research, we outline
> research agenda for the next developmental phase in school
effe.   ̄ness studies. This agenda argues for a broadening of the
applicatiuii of context controls in the research and a sensitivity to the
political economy of schools in their organizational and community
environments. Specifically, we note that a more comprehensive
consideration of context can take advantage of research that has already
been completed and that was designed to be sensitive to context factors,
though it was carried on "outside" the rubric of effective schools
research. (Note 1) Some of this "outside research" uses a multi-level

approach to understanding the forces that can affect school achievement; those forces are present in individual classrooms, larger organizational settings, and communities, as well as the collective climate of the school site.

The introduction of the gestalt we call "the political economy of school effectiveness" will bring us full circle to the opening value issues that, we contend, have shaped the first phases in the history of school effectiveness research. That is to say, a political economic understanding of schools and their effects on children's achievement can retain a balance of both the concern for equity within and among schools and a press of efficiency in the ways schools convert resources into learning.

School Effectiveness in Urban Elementary Schools: The Equity Basis of Phase One

It is a commonly written "forward" to discussions of school effectiveness research that its organizing questions, sampling procedures, and implications have been consciously constructed as a response to the findings in Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972). These researchers concluded that differences in children's achievement are more strongly associated with the characteristics of their family background than with school-based variables. Receiving the Coleman/Jencks conclusion as a challenge, some educators set out to disprove or modify it by locating and describing schools that serve children from poor families where achievement gains were unusually high (Weber, 1971; Klitgaard & Hall, 1974; Edmonds, 1979b; Brookover et al., 1979; Phi Delta Kappa, 1980).

Precisely because of the motivation behind these earlier school effectiveness studies of the 1970s, the sample of schools selected for study often had limitations. First, school effectiveness was studied primarily in urban schools. It is significant that one of the first articles to win popular currency for ^his line of research was Edmonds' "Effective schools for the urban poor" (1979a, emphasis added). Furthermore, because basic literacy and mathematics learning were the outcome measures highlighted by Coleman, the selection of sites for research on school effectiveness was even more restricted. (The study by Rutter and associates, 1979, is an important exception.) Researchers tended to choose the elementary level where the production of "basic skills" is considered a legitimate and important focus. In this regard, it is interesting to note that methodological investigations into techniques commonly used for identifying extraordinarily effective schools concluded that smaller (hence elementary) schools would dominate study samples (Rowan et al., 1983; Rowan & Denk, 1984).

In its first decade, then, school effectiveness research could aptly be labeled "elementary-urban school effectiveness research." The outcomes of the earlier studies of urban elementary schools are now popularly known as a set of approximately five overlapping correlates of school effectiveness, variously labeled

> vision/mission/academic goal consensus,
> climate (often prefixed by "safe and orderly"),
> strong (instructional) leadership,
> high expectations for student achievement, and
> close monitoring/alignment of instructional programs. (Note 2)

The sense in which the early school effectiveness research was "out to prove Coleman wrong" also gave it a distinct tone of advocacy for the poor. Here the thematic undertones of equity infuse the earlier period

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of school effectiveness research. For example, Mackenzie (1983)
referred to the earlier students of school effectiveness as "advocacy
researchers." Ralph and Fennessey (1983) wondered if the effective
schools model was the product of "science or reform," using "reform" in
the normative sense applied to equal opportunity. Lezotte (1984), in a
symposium dedicated to Ron Edmonds after his death, recalls a return
trip from the annual meeting of the American Educational Research
Association held in Montreal, "filled with ideas and energy" and "an
agenda for action...aimed at furthering the cause of the poor and
minorities in our schools." In this effort, Edmonds, says Lezotte, was
a "friend, research colleague, and fellow school-improvement advocate"
(p. 1).

Proving that schools were contributing to the achievement of
students in some lower SES elementary schools motivated the early
leaders in school effectiveness research. Their interest was to
forestall and even reverse the policy effects of the "Coleman
conclusion" which implied that equalizing children's achievement (and,
it was assumed, their future social and economic opportunities) was not
achievable through an adjustment of school inputs. As Edmonds (1979a)
declared, "We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach
all children whose schooling is of interest to us." The implication
emerges that only the schooling of some children--namely, middle class
children--normally "interests us." Early school effectiveness research
was to capture our interest in the schooling of poorer children by
challenging the idea that schools could not make a difference for them.

School Effectiveness in Context:

The Efficiency Basis of Phase Two

With the first "cautionary notes" about the early school
effectiveness research came the warnings that the schools selected for
investigation were urban, elementary sites that overwhelmingly served
lower-SES populations (Rowan et al., 1983; Cuban, 1983; Good & Brophy,
1986). At this point the term, "context," first took its place in the
discussion of school effects. Context was elevated as a critical issue
because the conclusions about the nature, behavior, and internal
characteristics of the effective (urban elementary) schools either did
not fit the intuitive understanding that people had about other kinds of
schools or were not replicated in the findings of research on secondary
and higher SES schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hall & Griffin, 1982).

Research on secondary schools, for example, found that the early
research correlate of "goal consensus" was problematic. Firestone and
Herriott found that comprehensive high schools tended to support a
variety of academic and programatic emphases, and Lipsitz (1984)
described four middle schools which had distinctly different senses of
mission, including becoming the "best in the county," implementing a
successful desegregation process, promoting diversity, and creating a
high quality arts curriculum.

When schools with students from middle SES backgrounds were
studied, their characteristics, like those of secondary schools, were
also found to be at odds with findings in the earlier effective schools
studies. Compared with lower SES elementary schools, for example,
reward structures in middle SES schools were less strong and "public,"
parental involvement was higher and took differing forms, and principals

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acted more like "managers" than "initiators" in fulfilling the role of
instructional leader (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Teddlie & Stringfield,
1985). Research by Evans (1987) is exploring more fully than anyone has
before the possible relationships between school context, principal's
change facilitating style, and school effectiveness.

Although many practitioners and academics continue to cling to the
five classic correlates of school effectiveness research, extentions of
that research persist in exposing context conditions that challenge the
more literal readings of the earlier findings. Hallinger and Murphy
(1982) and Cuban (1984), for example, found that administrative
context--the degree to which the superintendent supports and presses for
school improvement--affects the ability of individual schools to produce
extraordinary achievement. Good and Brophy (1986) also cite
administrative context as important, but for different reasons. When
individual schools have administrative discretion to hire personnel and
control their budgets, "the potential for school effects is larger...."
(p. 59).

Talbert (1985) studied private schools to compare effectiveness
potential with the early findings. She concluded that where climate (or
"moral order") is an important ingredient, private schools have an
easier time achieving a congruence with their clientels and, hence,
becoming goal directed. However, even within the sector of private
schools, Talbert found significant variation in the ways goals were
defined. Religious private schools tended to achieve goal uniformity
through an emphasis on basic skills and moral and ethical development.
Non-religious private schools stressed what Talbert called "social
awareness," "self-esteem," and "deviant goals." While religous schools

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operated on the authoritative power of the school, non-religious schools had a shared sense of adult authority, involving parents more frequently in the process. Based on these findings, Talbert concluded that "policy and administrative guidelines aiming to enhance school effectiveness should attend to organizational differences among U.S. schools" (Talbert, 1985, p. 2).

For Talbert, the context differentiation due to "organizational differences" forced a reconsideration of the meaning of the effective schools finding about "academic goal consensus." For other reviewers, context (in particular SES and grade level), challenges a direct application of the finding that effective schools are characterized by close monitoring, explicit structuring, and "top-down" control (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Rosenholtz, 1985; Dwyer et al., 1983). In some extraordinarily effective schools collaboration and "team leadership" among teachers and administrators appears to be a contributing factor.

The introduction and exploration of context differences among schools and their relationships to effectiveness--this second generation in the school effectiveness research--lends this period a different cast from the earlier one. The term "school" in the nomenclature carries a broader meaning. The relevant categories of schools expand from poor urban elementary schools to virtually all schools--elementary and secondary; urban, rural, suburban, and small town; public and private. Despite its appellation, "effectiveness," the research shifts value categories from equity to efficiency.

The value of efficiency highlights the second phase in this research because studies that use student achievement as the common

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outcome measure and pair up schools for the similarity of their expenditure characteristics are able to investigate the degree to which non-fiscal characteristics are associated with the production of student achievement. While controlling for material resources, the studies expose schools that are able to combine the qualities, attitudes, and behaviors of personnel in such a manner to produce comparatively high student achievement. ("Comparison" here is bound by context; that is, comparison requires that one control, as much as possible, for context differences.) If Phase One in the school effectiveness research might more accurately be called "school equity" research, Phase Two, then, may be labeled "school efficiency" research.

Context and An Agenda for
Phase Three in School Effectiveness Research
School effectiveness research is much improved by its sensitivity to context. Successful applications of school effectiveness findings depend upon a "context-match" between research sites and implementation sites. In this section we discuss the question of applications. Yet, consideration of context brings other matters to the surface, as well. Any given research study that explores the consequences of context variables taken one at a time may, in the end, have limited usefulness. In the concluding parts of this section, we discuss the redirection and revitalization of school effectiveness research that can come with a broadened contextual approach, encompassing (1) previous research on student, community, and institutional influences on children's achievement and (2) a view of the school in its political and economic context.

Applications

Taking into account one or another context facet adjusts both the
design and conduct of school effectiveness research and modifies the
applications drawn from it when school improvement is based on its
findings. For example, if extraordinarily effective middle SES and
secondary schools do not fit the mold of extraordinarily effective lower
SES elementary schools, then the manner in which we attempt to change
less effective schools must be differentiated according to these context
factors.

We already have evidence from an early intervention in urban
elementary schools (where the grade level and SES contexts were not an
issue) that subject matter context may affect the successful application
of school effectiveness findings to produce higher student achievement.
McCormack-Larkin and Kritek (1983) found that achievement in mathematics
and reading varied radically with the application of effective schools
findings in Milwaukee's Project RISE. In the New York City School
Improvement Program (SIP) program, Clark and McCarthy (1983) concluded
that the successful integration of school effectiveness findings into
school procedures depended, in part, upon whether or not the teachers
and principals had voluntarily participated in the project. "Volunteer
effects" may mask context differences among the schools where the SIP
was implemented. Any future application of school effectiveness
findings clearly needs to be cognizant of the potential confounding
influence of context.

Context in Previous Research

The new importance of context in school effectiveness research also
opens it to a dialogue with other kinds of research that take context

into account. For example, Salley, McPherson, and Baehr (1979) isolated the personal, school, and SES characteristics of principals that differentiate the kinds of job tasks requiring the largest portions of their time. Salley and his colleagues report that context variables such as type and siz of school, and the SES and ethnic composition of the student body and teaching staff contributed most to the way in which principals described their job demands. This kind of research that takes context into account "outside the norms" of school effectiveness research represents a useful companion for the future of inquiry into school effects.

For all its advancement in looking more closely at process and climate variables (rather than just material inputs) as the definition of school contributions to achievement, effective schools research has been unable to capture the multi-level interactions of classroom, school, school district, and community factors that shape and allow whatever value the school adds to children's achievement (Good & Brophy, 1986). Strands within school effectiveness research to date have studied individual levels (central office support) or discrete features (principals' instructional leadership) that contribute to the mix, but none has mounted the kind of research that approximates the situational, multi-level, and multivariate nature of school settings.

The most salient and critical extension of effective schools research in a multi-level perspective would move it into classrooms in a manner different from its customary approach to date. Edmonds called for this marriage of school and classroom research in 1982. While varieties of "effective teacher" variables are now embedded in the more sophisticated school effectiveness research (Teddlie et al., 1984), the

tendency to average out classroom effects at the level of the school (or, more accurately, at the level of a single grade level, extrapolated to the school) hides the effects of teacher decisions on individual children and groups within classrooms. This shortcoming chances to miss certain of the equity consequences of schooling that the first school effectiveness researchers set out explore. After all, as Cohen (1983) notes, the greatest achievement differences are measurable within schools.

A line of inquiry primed for a linkage with the popular effective schools research is the strand alternately called "input-output" or "production function" research. Most of the studies in this cast use economic models to track resource allocations (often to the classroom level), and some have been careful to acknowledge context issues and within-school variances. Murname (1981), as one example, discusses a wide literature on the effects of teacher characteristics, peer interactions, instructional time, and curriculum that highlights contextual differences based on student achievement groupings, teacher decisions, family SES, and institutional rule-making. Murname faults the kinds of quantitative studies that he reviews because they are insensitive to "behavioral responses" to changes in resource allocations that might come with public policy decisions about increasing school effectiveness for the disadvantaged. In this regard, Murname's economic orientation is highly compatible with the social-psychological underpinnings of the effective schools literature.

Two of the most insightful approaches in the economic/resource allocation tradition focus on SES context (1) to study intra-classroom effects and (2) family influences on achievement. Thomas, Kemmerer, and

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Monk (1982) inquired into the "value of children's time" and its effects on parents', teachers', and administrators' decisions about allocating resources. They concluded that

> [s]tudent time, which is partially under the control of the students themselves, constitutes a potentially important resource. It incorporates the effects of prior investment, and its quality is an important determinant of achievement....In particular the mean, variation, and skewedness of the distribution of ability [an expression of the value of student time] in classrooms may partially determine the manner in which teachers organize their students for instruction....Since educational structures or technologies are developed in classrooms, classroom-level research is needed to identify the determinants of classroom structure and the effects of structure on student behavior. (p. 116)

If school effects are important in the aggregate, they are equally important in their influence on individuals and groups within the school and its classrooms. Thomas and his associates, then, expand our definition of classroom or instructional context in a necessary direction. We should also note that they broaden context issues beyond the classroom and school by considering the effect of children's ability on parental decisions (including reinforcing school learning by helping with homework).

A similar consideration of community context (home effects) would pull together the interests of effective schools researchers and previous work in this area. Effective schools research offers, at best, a confused picture about the degree to which parents are important to effect schooling. The issue left for teachers and principals to decide--without clear guidance from the research--is whether the cultivation of parental involvement in their children's academic learning (as opposed to school support functions) will return a payoff high enough to be worth the investment. Benson's (1982) research in the

Childrens Time Study Project in California suggests that family SES

makes a major difference.

> [Our research findings] suggest that parental action in high- and
> low-SES circles lack great power, either to prevent a high-SES
> child from doing rather well in school, or to help a low-SES child
> find him/herself in a high-achievement category. What of the
> middle group? ...the effects of school, neighborhood, and class
> (meaning assessment of the worth of educational accomplishment) on
> the child are themselves problematical. The parent in this
> confused situation becomes the more dominant force in determining
> his or her children's achievement. (p. 75)

The conclusion we draw from this short review of studies outside the

Weber-Edmonds-Brookover tradition is that these kinds of

context-sensitive literatures make a good companion for designing more

comprehensive school effectiveness research in the future.

The Political Economy of Effective Schools

As we become increasingly aware of the web of context variables

that create the "situation" in which schools function, we are reminded

of the intricate and confounding effects of their political and economic

environments. The stories of two schools we know about help us capture

this idea. Both are elementary schools, Kindergarten through sixth

grade, in an the same urban school district.

School One

School One is situated in a middle class neighborhood and has about

500 children from a variety of SES backgrounds. Approximately eighty

percent of the students come from the immediate neighborhood, and the

remaining numbers are admitted "on permit" from around the district

(that is, their parents applied for special admission to the school).

The school is "known" to be one of the better elementary schools in the

district. It has teachers whose preparation was completed in what are

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considered the better universities in the area or in universities outside the area and state. Whenever a vacancy comes open, between 40 and 60 applicants file forms to get an interview.

About twenty percent of the children in School One have been admitted into the district's "gifted and talented" program. Given district and state regulations, this means that the students were recommended for testing by their teachers, and once admitted, spend about half their day in classroom groups about half the size of the regular ones.

About two-thirds of the school's parents typically respond to a request for a voluntary $15 materials fee; some of them send more than the per-child assessment. In addition, the parents raise about $10,000 in extra funds for the school's use, and the teachers organize a fund raiser that nets an additional $5,000. The school also manages its own before- and after-school care, tending to about 100 students; proceeds from this program add several more thousands of dollars to the school budget.

School One has an active parent volunteer program, coordinated by parent volunteers. A few parents who are not free during day-time hours help manage the account books on week-ends and in the evening.

When new renovation moneys became available to the school district, School One received an external facelift and internal fixing-up. (At the time, one of the members on the district school board was a parent of children in the school.) When the district administrator who supervises School One comments about the school, she does so in glowing terms adding, "I always love to visit there. It makes me feel good."

The principal and teachers expect to see her several times during the year, either during school hours or at after-school events.

School Two

School Two is situated in a poor neighborhood and has about 350 children; two-thirds come from a lower-middle SES neighborhood and the remaining numbers live in a nearby public housing project. Few people are aware of the school or have an opinion about its reputation. It has teachers who were born and grew up in the immediate area; about half had their preparation in what are considered the better universities in the area, and about half hold degrees from the least respected institut ons. Whenever a teaching vacancy comes open, it usually goes unfilled for at least six months; a teacher is eventually hired because of the principal's persistence in calling the district personnel office and university teacher preparation departments.

None of the children in School Two have been admitted into the district's "gifted and talented" program. Teachers say that they are not sure it is worth "the hastle." They expect that very few students would qualify, anyway.

To supplement the district budget, a $1000 dollars is raised annualy from a candy sale run by the teachers and a small number of parents. The parents do not have their own money-raising event and are not asked for any extra fees for materials. The principal and teachers contend that such a request would offend those who already have trouble making ends meet. School Two has a few parent volunteers who are scheduled and coordinated by the school secretary.

When new renovation moneys became available to the school district, School Two was "in the cycle" for a new roof, replacement of gutters

(that are hanging in loose strips from the walls), and a major reconstruction of its internal space. However, other schools were moved ahead of School Two during the first two years of the renovation efforts; to date, School Two has only managed to get its roof patched.

The central office administrator responsible for School One also oversees School Two. Last year she made one visit to the school--for reasons other than reviewing its programs or evaluating its achievement. At the end of that visit, she walked the halls with the principal for 20 minutes, shook hands, and said, "Let's consider this your evaluation visit."

The point of these stories is that context factors seem to conspire in their working for or against schools. For School One, parents, teachers, and school system can feed on and reinforce each others' enthusiasm and work efforts. Teachers vie to get appointed there for the same reasons that the central supervisor enjoys coming to the school. Parents are expected to support the school because teachers and principal feel that they have a program worth supporting; parents respond well.

In School Two, few things seem to go well. The adults are disconnected from each other--teachers seldom work cooperatively together and seldom see parents. The school has minimal resources to work with and little energy to do anything about it. New teachers in the building are often there because they could not find a job anywhere else. The most critical result of these widely differing political economies of School One and School Two is the quality of life for the children in them. In addition, achievement levels between schools

differ to a degree far greater than can be accounted for by the socioeconomic background of the children.

We assert that school effectiveness research must be able to capture something of the political economy of schools, in details like the ones we have begun to build for School One and School Two, to fully understand them. The heuristic of "political economy" is a helpful concept in that it acknowledges the interaction of political influence (or lack of it) and economic resources (or lack of them) i the functioning of individual schools. What is equally importe in the discussion of effective schools is that context variables often carry with them political and economic dimensions that get muted and lost when we look at discrete, separable factors in the production of student outcomes (cognitive or non-cognitive). In this regard, political economic understandings of schools support the efficiency values in school effectiveness research by more fully explicating the ways in which schools with similar children and similar governmentally allocated resources can develop relatively differing environments. It also sharpens the equity focus in school effectiveness research by exposing the multiply confounding and reinforcing effects of school and community conditions that can support the development of some schools and place a loadstone around others.

Notes

1. We are calling "school effectiveness research" that body of studies that have been included in most, if not all, of the major reviews carrying that title, such as those by Purkey and Smith (1983), Mackenzie (1983), Clark et al. (1984), Rosenholtz (1985), and Good and Brophy (1986).

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2. As Hallinger and Murphy (1986) point out, high parental involvement correlates with school effectiveness in some but not all of the studies of urban elementary schools. Nevertheless, some reviews of the research and some individual studies finding no strong association between school effectiveness and parental invovlement persist in adding it to the list of generalizable findings.

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