
John Goodlad and the Origins of the Idea of Simultaneous Renewal¹

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Abstract: The author describes some of the biographical and cultural origins influencing John Goodlad's concept of simultaneous renewal as a strategy for improving public education and teacher education quite different in its intent compared to other strategies – reforming, restructuring and reculturing. Seeing education improvement as first and foremost a learning problem and opportunity, simultaneous renewal represents a moral ideal grounded in recognition that the quality of human relationships is foundational to program quality and to realizing wider democratic aspirations.

KEYWORDS: John Goodlad, simultaneous renewal, human relations and learning, ecology

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;
6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved;
7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration;
8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and
9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structure

¹ *The text of a talk given at the annual McKay School of Education partnership meeting, June 7, 2019.

The phrase, *education reform* seems to flow easily off the lips of any and everyone interested in educational change and improvement. That phrase came to be troubling for John Goodlad who recognized that reform, like *restructuring* and *reculturing*, brings with it a set of influential and potentially troubling hidden assumptions of consequence to what sorts of changes are sought and most valued by policy makers and educators. Reform suggests “external control directing a rearrangement and reshaping of aspects of established practice. In reform, stuff is moved around.” Established ends remain. Grounded in behavioral psychology, restructuring calls attention to the importance of changing environments, especially administrative arrangements, to alter educator behavior. Reculturing “centers on changing expectations, roles, and relationships as essential to improvement.” In contrast to these three change strategies, simultaneous renewal recognizes that change is first and foremost a human problem, a shared learning problem, where “learning is understood as a sociocultural process involving thoughtful problem solving,” which may result in reculturing and involve restructuring (Bullough & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 25). In contrast to reform, restructuring and reculturing, with its focus on learning simultaneous renewal embraces the full complexity and fundamental messiness of the work of education within which human relationships and competence and shared and increasing capacity are of central importance.

To understand the concept of simultaneous renewal and its educational power, the intent of this brief article is to present a small slice of the history and development of the thinking of John Goodlad, the person behind the idea. Origins of ideas matter a great deal. In particular they matter when those origins are located within or without the practice they are intended to influence, a conclusion central to the thinking of John Dewey (1929; see Rosenbaum, 2015). Reform, restructuring and renewal usually bring with them imposed solutions to assumed or imposed problem definitions; in contrast, as central to the conversation about and the work of partnering, simultaneous renewal is an idea that grew out of the soil of practice.

John Goodlad: A Professional Biography

Goodlad was born August 19, 1920. His hoped-for future as a young man was to become an elementary schoolteacher which required a year of normal school. In 1937 requirements changed: a year at a university was expected, something well beyond the family's means. A teacher shortage changed things, however. As Goodlad wrote (2004, p. 89), “Some wise person or group in the policy arena authorized the offering of the first year of higher education in selected, qualified high schools.” Tuition was \$10 per month, a prohibitively high sum but with help from his Uncle Andy, Goodlad enrolled in September in Senior Matriculation along with about two dozen other young high school graduates.

A second year of preparation came at the normal school in Vancouver which included a variety of field experiences. Goodlad wrote of his first school practicum, that he “learned a lot, mostly about what I hoped never to let happen. I felt bad for the children, but what had gone on there would have gone on without me. What I badly needed was a chance to talk things through with someone of experience and insight who shared some of my concerns” (p. 101). Among his concerns was a nagging question: “How much of a child's self-respect are we willing to sacrifice for what amount of a school's progress in academic achievement?” His second assignment was in the Lynn Valley Elementary School where, he said, he realized how “profoundly different the cultures of schools can be” – “a tone of caring and civility... permeated the whole school” (p.

102). Parents were welcome in the school and were listened to. The classroom within which he taught was “large and cluttered” (p. 103) and filled with “flora and fauna requiring tender loving care,” and his cooperating teacher, Ed Cowan, was knowledgeable, skilled and committed to his learning and development as a teacher. This was, Goodlad concluded, a time of “joy” (p. 102).

At age 19 Goodlad got his first teaching job at Woodward’s Hill school. He described entering the school on the first day. “Inside,” he wrote, “profound stillness and a dampish chill... [There was] a small fire, laid in the bulbous black stove promptly at six, to burn out several hours later – enough to warm the room a little. Then, bodies would take over; no point in depleting the year’s allocation of coal. But much more fire and heat would have been required to temper the melancholy of a bleak schoolroom absent of any other than rodent occupation for ten weeks.” (p. 115). The classroom was sparsely furnished with old spellers and readers, some paper, 35 desks fastened to wooden runners, and the stove. A 20-foot-long chalkboard ran the length of the front wall. Making a seating chart, he placed five 1st graders in the row by the windows, then moving toward the windowless wall two 2nd graders and four 3rd graders in the next row, then came three 4th graders, five 5th graders, five 6th graders and two 7th graders, and eight 8th graders. Goodlad said the chart was useless. The children already knew where they belonged.

Each grade level had a different curriculum that Goodlad was expected to teach. Thinking back on that first day, he wrote: “John Dewey had something to say about the extent to which most teachers are doomed to repeat the ways of their first year of teaching for the rest of their lives. It was just my first day and I was being relentlessly molded” (p. 117). Facing such diversity, Goodlad found himself working late at night planning lessons for each age group. He wrote out a weekly schedule on the blackboard for all grades and all subjects. His record for one day was 56 blackboard assignments – 224 assignments was the peak for a week (p. 124). Once the curriculum was set, the students routinized, he was able to spend time talking with the children and learning about them and their interests. He read to the children from books like *Winnie the Pooh* that connected with all the age groups and he got the children writing to one another as well to him. He reported enjoying the variety provided by the education ministry’s requirement of weekly lessons in art, music, health and physical education. He also sought to identify and respond to “cross-grade” interests (p. 125) in history and geography and over time explored pedagogical alternatives, including the use of radio and of a sand table for studying geography that enabled what later would be understood to be a correlated curriculum. He reported that they “got into mining, lumbering, farming, and fishing, students of all ages brought books, pamphlets, photos, and more. They read and they wrote; the two were intertwined” (p. 129).

Goodlad’s Reflections and the Development of Simultaneous Renewal

Looking back on this time, Goodlad concluded, “Nothing in my entire career has contributed more to my views on the conduct of schooling than my brief apprenticeship in a one-room school.” The seeds of Goodlad’s and Robert Anderson’s 1959 publication, *The Nongraded Elementary School* were planted at this time when Goodlad was only 19 years old. In the introduction to that book, Goodlad, reminiscing about that time, wrote of one of the students, Ernie, who was 13 years old.

“You see, Ernie wasn’t very bright. His I.Q. was estimated to be about 68. He couldn’t read. After all, if a young fellow can’t read . . . well, there just isn’t any point in moving

him across the room with the other kids. There are standards, you know. You can't very well put a boy who can't read in the third grade or the fifth or the seventh. Why, pretty soon a grade-level would come to mean nothing at all, absolutely nothing! And so, Ernie stayed right where he began – in a seat by the window.” (1959, p. v).

Goodlad continued, “Ernie’s teacher (referring to himself) carried the memory of him like a battle scar, a wound that sometimes flares as red as Ernie’s hair.” In 1946, age 26, Goodlad carried that scar with him to the University of Chicago where he had time to “listen, read, think, and think some more.” (p. vi) The question driving Goodlad’s thinking is one we continue to struggle with today: How do we create school cultures that fully support children’s and educator’s learning?

Reflecting on this question, Goodlad concluded “[i]t seemed to me to be a little odd for the culture of the university to be so dominant in teacher education when the end goal is the education of boys and girls in elementary and secondary schools. My daily work was bringing me into the logistics and problems of joining two quite different cultures in the work of educating teachers” (2004, p. 217). He recognized that he was, in fact, what he came to call a hybrid educator, someone who has one foot in the schools and another in the university. One of his insights about change was that “Changing schools is a little like reducing weight. Weight taken off slowly by changes in diet and regular exercise tends to stay off. Weight taken off quickly by short-term, quick reduction fads tends to come back. If you skip the time-consuming processes of involving the people who have a stake in a school, the first-level changes quickly attained fade, often strengthening the hold of the deep structure that continues to prevail” (p. 223).

Over the years, Goodlad came to realize the “power and necessity of renewal in the healthy continuity of individuals, institutions, and the social, political, and natural order in the well-being of humankind and planet earth. Renewal,” he continued, “requires a sense of moral identity that consciously guides individual and collective transcendence from narcissism through tribalism to much broader intellectual, spiritual, and behavioral compass. Few of us make the journey without hurting someone or damaging something along the way. There is no beckoning goal of excellence or perfection to be attained even as one acquires pieces of parchment attesting to such along the journey. Helping the young to sense this moral identity and to engage in its strengthening through lifelong renewal is what makes teaching a moral endeavor, whether in home, school, or marketplace” (2004, pp. 260-261).

There is an additional source of Goodlad’s developing thought about simultaneous renewal that I think is underappreciated – an influence arising from shifts in the intellectual climate within which he was developing and maturing as an educator. In a remarkable recently published book, *Facing the Abyss: American literature and culture in the 1940s* (2018) George Hutchinson, a professor of English, explores ecology and culture to argue that during the 1940s there arose what he calls an “ecological orientation [that was] new” (p. 333). Such an orientation surely was in the air at Chicago (see Wraga, 2017). Consistent with his reading of Dewey, whose influence on Goodlad was substantial, such an orientation “places emphasis on process rather than end” (Hutchinson, 2018, p. 335). Hutchinson, quoting Lewis Mumford, extends the argument: “every living creature is part of the general web of life: only as life exists in all its processes and realities, from the action of the bacteria upward, can any particular unit of it continue to exist. As our knowledge of the organism has grown, the importance of the

environment as a co-operative factor in its development has become clearer; and its bearing upon the development of human societies has become plainer, too" (p. 336).

The bottom line is that rather than think of individuals having relationships, the more accurate characterization is to say that relationships – cultures, systems, institutions, including families and public school partnerships – have individuals, that we are because we are in relation and we are always in relation (see p. 380). Moreover, it is because of the relationships that have us that we learn and grow and to a significant degree become who we are – lacking them, there is no human *being*.

Goodlad often drew on Wendell Berry, poet, farmer, novelist, and environmental activist, to present his views and like Berry his language was sprinkled with ecological terms, most notably symbiosis. Before detailing the nature of what he called "productive symbiosis" as essential to building partnerships in education, Goodlad stated: "Years of working with school-university partnerships have convinced several colleagues and me that the symbiotic joining of the two cultures, however difficult, is essential to the renewal of both schools and the education of educators, and that the two processes are best undertaken simultaneously" (1994, p. 280). I would make the argument stronger: if these processes are to produce changes that are robust, living, although not necessarily long-lived, and morally defensible, renewal must be simultaneous.

Conclusion

I close with a brief story. A few days ago, I visited the F. Weixler and Company art gallery on E Street near our home in downtown Salt Lake City. Werner Weixler had recently purchased a remarkable and large pointillist painting of the Christ by Gary Smith, a local artist. The painting serves as a metaphor, a means for thinking a little deeper about the challenges and opportunities of simultaneous renewal. Standing close to the painting one sees dabs of paint, points of light of different colors and hues; slowly moving away from the painting a form gradually emerges, a sublime face. Each dab of paint sitting alongside other dabs, other partners, promises fresh meaning – as paintings do – meaning found in relationship. Yet that meaning finds its greatest power by virtue of seeing the full constellation of color; the environment of the whole reveals the meaning. Fewer dabs or dabs of paint less contrasting, a bit too much alike or perhaps too contrasting, too thick or too thin, small or large, and the form, only available at a distance, fails. As it is with partnering – we need to see broadly, beyond ourselves, and be hospitable to the differences we have with our partners even as we seek to locate and extend our similarities, a process that is enriching, surprising, and ultimately enlivening. Even as we cannot predict exactly what shape our partnership will take in the future – partnering, after all, is a process – what we can be certain of is that by investing in the relationship or partnership or, put more accurately, being warmly held by that relationship, we become smarter about the problems that confront us. To become smarter about those problems and how to manage them better we need our partners, desperately, with the result that the range of interesting, fruitful and contextually sensitive responses to them expands exponentially, our energy grows and finds focus, and we learn and grow and simultaneously and almost unexpectedly we are renewed, reborn.

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