Extending Educational Reform: From One School to Many. Amanda Datnow, Lea Hubbard, and Hugh Mehan. Educational Change and Development series. Andy Hargreaves and Ivor F. Goodson, eds. New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002. 179 pp.

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In the relatively brief span of 179 pages, Amanda Datnow, Lea Hubbard, and Hugh Mehan provide a pointed and useful analysis of large-scale school reform processes as they are implemented at the local level. The authors do not judge the merits of the seven reform designs (the Audrey Cohen College System of Education; The Modern Red Schoolhouse; Success For All; Achievement Via Individual Determination; Core Knowledge; Coalition of Essential Schools; Comer School Development Program) but rather look to a number of local implementation efforts, both successful and not. Their combined studies of such implementation efforts have yielded an important insight, that attempted imported reforms succeed or fail at local levels due to the relational context of structure, culture, and agency in existence, rather than because the reform itself is well or poorly designed.

Chapter 2 focuses on their central insight, as the authors examine the current widespread move to implement school reform; list the relations of power that reform implementation makes visible (for example, representation in decision-making); and note that the relational context precludes a straightforward top-down or bottom-up process of implementation. In turn, their analysis is more finely developed in the succeeding five chapters, which examine local context, change agents, design teams, the sustainability of the reforms, and prospects for sustained change. Each chapter concludes with fairly lengthy lists of observations, suggestions, and advice for those who would import reform models or designs into their local schools and districts.

Throughout the text the authors maintain an uncluttered focus on the interrelations among structure, culture, and agency as they play out in the process of importing, adapting, and implementing educational reforms. This is the primary strength of the analysis, as it provides a multi-dimensional framework within which to understand why some attempts at importing educational reforms founder while others thrive. The interplay of structure, culture, and agency highlight relations of power, and are particularly well explicated in Chapter 2.

An additional strength of the text is the extensive, well-researched database upon which it rests. A reasonable scope of represented reform designs is included in the clutch of multi-year, multi-site studies. The Appendix and Introduction both include succinct and clear descriptions of the exemplified reforms, and are excellent stand-alone resources. Situating the studied reforms along a continuum from highly prescriptive to quite loosely-organized provides the reader with a picture of a range of philosophies regarding education and school change.

One feature of the text, redundancy, is both a strength and flaw. The redundancy across the chapters reinforces a number of important observations and conclusions, such as the need to carefully consider the process of principal and teacher "buy-in" as reform implementation is attempted. Genuine buy-in supports successful implementation, but genuine buy-in is both a function and constituent of structure, culture, and agency as they play out in schools, school districts, and reform organizations, to name just three sites. The flaw, minor as it is, is that the text suffers from a lack of rich and varied descriptions of practices that would allow the reader to see the interplay of structure, culture, and agency in the buy-in process more vividly. As a result, the potentially useful suggestions and observations that conclude each chapter feel prescriptive rather than exciting or inspiring.

The primary usefulness of this volume may well be for school and school district administrators who are considering adopting or adapting any outside model for school reform. If consulted by district and school-based administrators, the text's function will vary, depending upon when it is consulted. For example, a careful consideration of the observations of the outcomes of the illustrated cases may influence the early processes of examining programs or packages in order to identify strengths that match school or district needs, design characteristics that might give pause, and so on. During the next stages of orchestrating the necessary "buy-in" by affected personnel and other interested parties, the guidelines provided at each chapter's end may well help facilitate this process. At any stage, the observations, analyses, and conclusions of Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan can prompt essential reflection on the process and outcomes of the implementation, illuminate areas of strength, accord, conflict and so on that might otherwise go unnoticed and unattended, and provide ideas for meeting challenges and solving problems.