



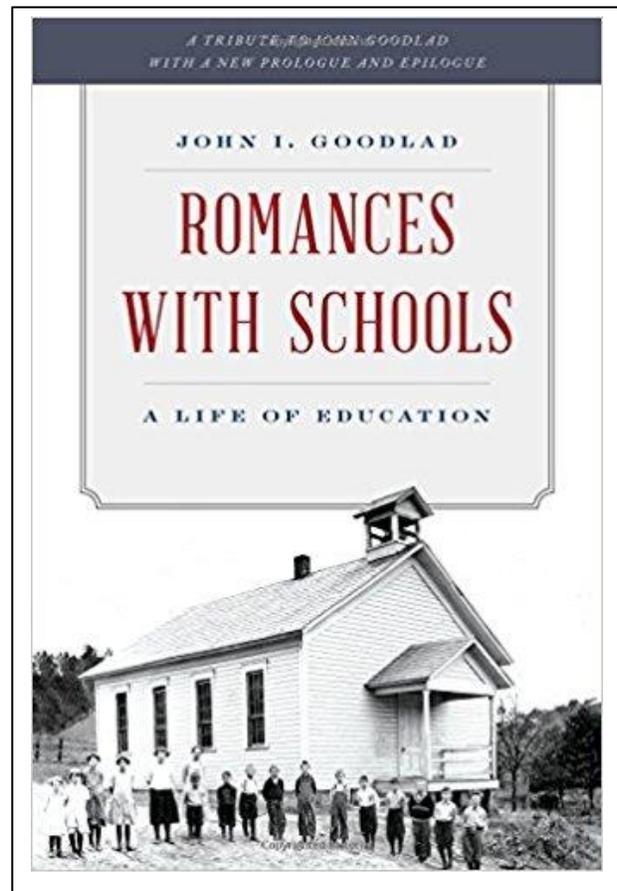
Goodlad, J. I. (2016). *Romances with schools: A life of education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

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Anyone who has attended school likely has developed his or her own opinions about education, based on the types of experiences that did or did not contribute to their own learning, the parts of school that they did or did not enjoy, and the ways that their learning did or did not contribute to their future success. In this respect, author John Goodlad (1920–2014) is like any other learner looking back at his educational experience and dissecting the decisions and serendipities that led him down a 60-year path of working for educational reform and improvement. What is different about Dr. Goodlad’s work, however, is that his reminiscing is interwoven with a deep understanding of changing educational policy and reform movements, substantiated by learning theory. His work, *Romances with Schools: A Life of Education*, represents more than one person’s account of his education; it is an argument for democratic schooling that captures students’ imaginations and acts as an invitation to educators to engage in continual inquiry into the purposes and practices of schooling, what Goodlad refers to as “educational renewal”.



The book follows a chronological history of Goodlad's own K-12 and graduate schooling, through his early teaching years and various leadership positions in higher education and closes with his time as dean of UC Berkeley. (Interestingly, the book does not chronicle much of the author's time at the Center for Educational Renewal, the work for which Goodlad may have been most well known in his later years, although the epilogue by Roger Soder does provide some detail regarding the national organization dedicated to the ideals of continual educational inquiry). The historical narrative consists of stories from his teaching and learning experiences that formed his beliefs about education and lie at the heart of his questions around schooling. Goodlad viewed some of his educational experiences as "romances", long-term enthusiasms that had a lasting impact. These romances spur the development of several reoccurring themes in Goodlad's work. For instance, his time spent in a one-room schoolhouse in his tiny Canadian hometown influenced his focus on the democratic purpose of education and the need for all students to have meaningful learning experiences in the classroom.

However, not all of Goodlad's experiences count as romantic. He describes many instances of his schooling career that were more tedious, tiring, or transactional in nature. His work as ??? at a small school in Florida is an example of his work that failed to develop into a full blown love affair, due to the fact that he was commuting and unable to sustain daily relationships with the teachers and students. The transition from living near campus to commuting was another reason he felt a gradual distance from Biscoq, a juvenile correction center school, a place where he once loved working. That romance came to an end after he found himself spending more time in the car and less time with students. The main idea of these anecdotes was not that Dr. Goodlad found commuting to be a soul-draining, crushing experience, although that certainly can be said for so much of life spent

in traffic. The point is that sustained presence and genuine relationships are needed if students and teachers are to love schools. This is an attractive idea, but how does "being there" fit into the reform agenda? What does a professional development program for helping teachers to love school and their students look like? Is a focus on kindness and understanding hopelessly old-fashioned, especially when today's schools face such difficult challenges?

Considering the style and tone, this book could be dismissed as quaint. Not only does *Romances with Schools* avoid the traditional language of educational reform, it at times reads like an *Anne of Green Gables* adventure, and not only because large parts of the memoir take place in rural Canada. For example, in one story from his elementary school days, Dr. Goodlad tells of his entire class going to his teacher's home in the middle of the day to eat cookies and wait for her famous cuckoo clock to perform. In another example, he was accidentally truant. On his second day of school he mistook the morning recess bell for the end of the day dismissal and went fishing instead of returning to class. The story is a funny reminder of how different the passage of time seems to a very young person and has the feel of innocent days gone by. The actual circumstances of Goodlad's young romance with elementary school would not translate well to schools today. It is unlikely that students will be visiting their teacher's house for cookies during a mid-morning break. However, the larger ideas in play deserve consideration. One of the most salient themes is the need for a moral and ethical culture in schooling that refuses to do any harm to children. Two ways Goodlad argues for more just schooling are through eliminating age- and grade-based cohorts in schooling and by asking educators to continually interrogate their practices and the educational system.

Goodlad believed that teaching is a deeply moral endeavor and an exercise in being human. He argued for an educational

experience that was not only focused on content and based in useful pedagogical techniques, but that allowed humans to flourish. He stated:

It is rarely the classroom pedagogy of our teachers we remember. Rather, it is their classroom personalities. Teachers teacher who they are...The history or mathematics they taught or failed to teach us pales in comparison with what they taught us about being human (p. 10).

For Goodlad, being human meant cultivating a life-long curiosity that drove learning for learning's sake. He was distressed by reform movements that focused primarily on economic and workforce goals for education at the expense of more humanistic aims. He wrote:

If learning is, above all else, what it means to be human, and learning with others is what sustains a renewing culture, then it is necessarily lifelong. It does not end when schooling ends. And the romances of the young with learning must not be endangered by making school instrumental to adults' predictions of their future. Nobody has come back from the future to tell us what it is like. This perversity has been so excessive that school learning is the present era of reform scarcely connects with the loves of the young in *today's* world (p. 266)

Goodlad's vision for education included educating the whole person in a way that instilled cooperation and teamwork and prepared students to be engaged citizens, while still addressing content requirements. Education should be meaningful to students as it happens, not just utilitarian for some imagined future.

Once one understands that for Goodlad, continuous learning was the defining characteristic of being human, the disdain he had for age- and grade-based school cohorts

can be seen in a new light. If learning is what it means to be human, then stunting a student's learning potential through grade retention is a grave injustice. His personal experiences in school as a teacher and a learner led him to believe that student development is idiosyncratic and therefore, grade retention is problematic. He compares his own experience of almost being held back a grade to the life trajectory of a similar student who did not have parents who advocated for his grade promotion. The other student was held back and struggled for the rest of his educational career, while Goodlad, placed in a mixed grade classroom, occupied an in-between space that eventually resulted in his overall achievement. He advocated that other students should enjoy the benefit he had, stating:

The considerable differences in the academic progress of children, apparent even early in their school careers, simply do not fit into the age-graded structure of our schools—never have and never will. The question of whether promotion or non-promotion more favors children's well-being is simply the wrong question. The right questions pertain to how to organize a school so as to best foster the steady, continuous, satisfying progress of children in all areas of development...Learning—in all mansions of the self—is in large measure what it means to be human. Yet, we conduct our schools in many ways that dehumanize (p. 166).

Goodlad argued that achievement varies greatly by subject within individual students, let alone across classrooms, which makes single age-grade level distinctions arbitrary, and renders course grades unnecessary. He advocated for mixed age classrooms where older and younger students engage with the same materials at different levels. It is far less important, according to Goodlad, that students reach particular milestones at particular times, than it is that they are allowed

to develop naturally at their own pace, in the context of a supporting and humane environment.

Another reoccurring theme from the author's life stories is one of educational renewal through continual inquiry. This is the belief that learners and educators should persistently investigate their practice, and ask themselves what purposes those practices serve, and how they might be improved in order to better assist students. In one example, he pressed a prominent university supported lab school with a good reputation in the community to resist the urge to stay content in their success. He pushed, gently, with a never ending "why" to get to the heart of why things were done the way they were at the school, and to interrogate ways to improve. He aimed to cultivate a sense of potentiality, writing:

I opened myself up to unknown possibilities. This is what I have tried to do since then with my own graduate students, nearly all of whom have come with precise career goals in mind. This gets in the way of learning something for little other reason than wanting to. Such learning is mostly what renewal is all about--whether of the self, a program, an institution, or a culture. Unlike other reform or projects, renewal is never finished. Projects and reform begin to deteriorate the moment pronounced "done" (p.153).

For Goodlad, there was no end to learning. Borrowing from Postman and Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, Dr. Goodlad defined romantics as people who, "believe that the human situation is improvable through intelligent innovation. They are all courageous and imaginative thinkers, which means they are beyond the constricting intimidation of conventional assumptions" (p. 48). The author envisioned continual inquiry as a tool to get others on board with this romantic form of thinking. Rather than settling for the status quo, he believed that learning communities

could engage in continual inquiry together to define problems and construct intelligent innovations and solutions. He was particularly interested in reforming school culture through continuous renewal, with the specific aim of raising the moral and ethical aspects of schooling. His hope was to inspire more romantics to consider the ways schools and school culture can be different and more just for all students. In an era when a dating app's invitation to swipe left or a swipe right can count as romantic, Dr. Goodlad's book provokes readers to spend more time courting the humanistic intentions of education.

One of the aims of Goodlad's new edition was to better integrate his personal narrative with the larger story of North American schooling. The book certainly would have benefited from this revision, which was unfortunately cut short by his illness and passing in 2014. Instead, the original was republished, with the addition of a forward by his son Stephan, and an epilogue by his colleague Roger Soder. The book, although beautifully written, is at times difficult to follow. Goodlad's ruminating is pleasant, but not always straightforward. Dr. Goodlad's work is a meandering river through what he described as the "whorls" of his memory. This makes sense, as so much of his work seemed to be about practicing presence. The book fosters the sensation that it is okay to take one's time, explore the diversions, and contemplate the tangents on the way to a meaningful destination, much like the classroom experience for which Goodlad was an advocate.

It is not clear to me where I should place this book in my personal library. It is not a book about improvement science, though the work of educational renewal is a job of continuous improvement. It is not quite a memoir, or just a history of education. The deep valuing of human equality and commitment to justice for all students, in addition to the high premium placed on the moral nature of schooling, suggests that I

might move the text closer to the religion and spirituality section of my bookshelf. It would be equally at home in an educational foundations course or a graduate seminar. For those who are familiar with Dr. Goodlad's work on educational renewal, this book provides a nice perspective on the work that came before his national network.

What was true of Goodlad's students is true of this work, there is no need to limit it

to just one thing, or to force it to fit into just one category. A typical fourth grader may have a third grade reading ability while also mastering math materials usually reserved for the eighth grade. It is important to respect the idiosyncrasies of individual learners. Similarly, this genre-crossing book that chronicles the hybrid career of an educational innovator deserves critical engagement, wherever one should choose to place it in their collection.

About the Reviewer

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