



Inside the Black Box of Classroom Practice: Change without Reform in American Education

Larry Cuban

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A book that explores the problematic connection between education policy and practice while pointing in the direction of a more fruitful relationship, *Inside the Black Box of Classroom Practice* is a provocative culminating statement from one of America's most insightful education scholars and leaders.

Inside the Black Box of Classroom Practice takes as its starting point a strikingly blunt question: "With so many major structural changes in U.S. public schools over the past century, why have classroom practices been largely stable, with a modest blending of new and old teaching practices, leaving contemporary classroom lessons familiar to earlier generations of school-goers?"

It is a question that ought to be of paramount interest to all who are interested in school reform in the United States. It is also a question that comes naturally to Larry Cuban, whose much-admired books have focused on various aspects of school reform—their promises, wrong turns, partial successes, and troubling failures. In this book, he returns to this territory, but trains his focus on the still baffling fact that policy reforms—no matter how ambitious or determined—have generally had little effect on classroom conduct and practice.

Cuban explores this problem from a variety of angles. Several chapters look at how teachers, in responding to major policy initiatives, persistently adopt changes and alter particular routine practices while leaving dominant ways of teaching largely undisturbed. Other chapters contrast recent changes in clinical medical practice with those in classroom teaching, comparing the practical effects of varying medical and education policies. The book's concluding chapter distills important insights from these various explorations, taking us inside the "black box" of the book's title: those workings that have repeatedly transformed dramatic policy initiatives into familiar—and largely unchanged—classroom practices.

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