

Foreword

“A model is a nonworking representation of the original.” So says Larry Rosenstock, founder of High Tech High, when asked about whether HTH is a model of schools in the future. Larry rejects the idea of finding models to replicate when it comes to creating or improving schools because he believes in the essential role contexts play in making the best schools. The community, the history, the students, the adults, the geography, and the natural and political climate all should shape the school. Thus, all schools should be unique, different from one another instead of being the same.

However, making schools the same seems to have been the dominating strategy for improving education in recent decades. Schools were similar to begin with, but recent educational policies have been pushing schools to become even more uniform and standardized nationally, and even globally, through uniform curriculum standards, standardized testing, and other ostensibly evidence-based policies and practices drawn from flawed international assessments (Schleicher, 2018; Tucker, 2011; Zhao & Gearin, 2016). Even those who wish to be innovative are willing or encouraged to adopt existing models. The growing adoption of the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the franchising of some successful schools is an example (Zhao, 2015, 2016, 2017). Whenever I talk about why we need a new education paradigm, I get asked about whether a model exists. There have not been many attempts to make schools different, although such attempts certainly exist, as my colleagues and I document in our book *From “Yes, But” to “Yes, And”*: *Radical Changes in Education* (Zhao, Emler, Snethen, & Yin, 2019).

It is thus extremely refreshing to read Grant Lichtman’s latest book *Thrive*, in which he makes a compelling case for why schools should be unique and different from each other. He argues that for schools to survive and thrive in an increasingly market-driven environment, a school must offer unique values to students and parents. I am no fan of policies that turn education into a free market and use competition to drive educational changes because they often do not work and cause harms (Ravitch, 2010, 2013; Zhao, 2018, 2019). But, I agree with Grant’s assessment that schools are not immune to the fundamental change of increasing consumer choices.

What I found most appealing is Grant’s call for schools to find their unique value proposition, to find their North Star, and to build a culture of innovations of their own. Schools, not necessarily for the reason to win over other schools, should always be contextualized to meet the unique needs of their communities of students, parents, and educators. Moreover, in a world that needs a new paradigm of education, inventing different alternatives is much more needed than propagating existing models. Learning from others is great, but copying others is not.

In *Thrive*, Grant does a lot more than making the case for unique schools from a business perspective. With his extensive experiences working with schools in different countries and his deep understanding of education, Grant rightly places the human at the center of everything a school does. Naturally, the abundant advice he offers to develop unique schools is deeply rooted in the fundamental respect for all human actors involved in schools.

Such respect is not only necessary for creating winning schools, but also the foundation of true educational excellence.

Thrive goes beyond talking about what we should do; it discusses a lot about how we can do what we should do.

In this book, Grant generously shares his practical wisdom about what works to make schools unique. Drawing from multidisciplinary research and experiences, Grant provides a toolkit of strategies and tactics to school leaders to lead their communities on a journey toward uniqueness. In addition, the book is littered with insightful suggestions for making the journey exciting and rewarding for all involved.

Great schools cannot be copied or franchised. They are invented and reinvented. They are designed and redesigned. I am thankful that Grant Lichtman's book is here to help with the invention and design of unique schools.

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