

Understanding How School Change Really Happens

Achieving school reform is a long, arduous process. If one were to "tell it like it is," the effort is usually wrought with problems that most change agents are not fully prepared for problems such as the drudgery, the exhaustion, the conflicts between outsiders and insiders, the confusion over goals, and the adversarial relationships that develop among teachers and parents. However, preparedness and a realistic awareness of what to expect can mean the difference between a failed attempt and an ongoing process of positive, though often incremental, change. Rosetta Cohen tells a singular story of one high school's struggle to remake itself. This is the story of the Quest Program, a teacher-designed experiment in curricular reform. The participants - teachers, administrators, students, parents, and college collaborators - worked together to create an alternative class of ninth graders with the goal of promoting critical thinking and high self-esteem simultaneously. Through participant observations and extensive interviews with all involved in the change effort, Cohen's book draws you into the complex daily intrigues of high school life, vividly illustrating the impact of change on an often resistant institution and community. She puts the change efforts in perspective, analyzing the roles and dilemmas of all of the central players - the same elements that pervade the change efforts of any school. While Cohen illuminates the pitfalls you can expect when attempting reform, she also describes the successes that occurred during the three years of her study. Signs of progress included teachers feeling renewed and revitalized and students becoming more tolerant of one another. Cohen's observations and recommendations provide a guiding light for education faculty, change agents working with schools, central office administrators, site administrators, and teachers. For anyone hungry for real life models of school change, this powerful book presents valuable insight and understanding of the complex task of school change.

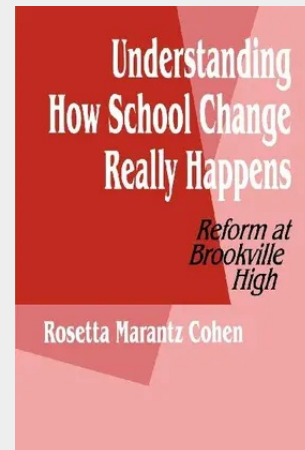
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31,80 €

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Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9780803962552

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-0-8039-6255-2

Verlag: Corwin

Erscheinungstermin: 12.09.1995

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: 1. Auflage 1995

Produktform: Kartoniert

Gewicht: 254 g

Seiten: 168

Format (B x H): 152 x 229 mm

