

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS-1: PROMISES AND PROBLEMS:
AN AMERICAN FORTNIGHT IN EDUCATION

Program in Public Policy Studies
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

Before embarking on my study of educational policy, I have taken a brief tour of important American experiments in education. I have taken this trip in order to inform myself first hand about what is best in American education. My tour took me from Los Angeles to Washington, from Texarkana to Boston. I decided to seek the best in American education so that I could know where the contemporary American educational frontiers are, where the exploration is now going on. By investigating the problems of the most adventurous American projects, I could come to understand the crucial issues facing us in the next decades.

In this newsletter I shall report my impressions of American education gleaned from my fortnight's tour. Appended to this letter is a complete itinerary of my journey, which ought to put the reader on his guard. My travels were what in Europe is known as an American fortnight: Monday it is London, Friday it is Berlin, Saturday it is Rome, the next Friday it is Paris, and Sunday it is home; and then one has "done" Europe. The limitation of such an approach to American educational problems is obvious. The best that I can hope to have taken away from this experience is some impression of trends in both promises and problems -- impressions made real by the many hours of time given to me by innumerable patient and perceptive people; but general impressions nevertheless. The caveat which the reader must keep in mind is that given the brevity of my visit to any particular place, I was unable to pursue the sort of comprehensive and thorough investigation of each particular experiment which each deserved. The constraints of time put me very much at the mercy of those who arranged my schedule at each location; therefore, I was unable to explore diverse sources of information in a manner which would enhance the objectivity of my impressions. Having stated this qualification, let me say that in spite of the constraints, this trip allowed me to develop a perspective on American education which I would have missed had I not personally seen so many and different approaches to the problems of education. I chose breadth of experience over intensity of investigation as the basis of my overview.

I divide my impressions into four categories: a report on primary and secondary education; a discussion of higher education; a look at new sorts of institutional arrangements for education; and a combined report of conversations with public officials and an analysis of various strategies for change in American education. The analysis of strategies for change raises two important questions which the reader ought to keep in mind

throughout this report: How do we change our educational policies? And how can our educational policies cope with change? With these questions in mind, let us turn to the experiments in primary and secondary education, which I visited during my educational fortnight.

I. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Three problems among the many which afflict public education in the United States show promise of some solution. These problems include:

- 1) how does one substantially change the curriculum in order to create a more effective educational process?
- 2) How does one restructure the internal organization of the schools in order to enhance the educational process?
- 3) How does one change the governing apparatus of public education in order to involve all elements of the community in the problems of education?

Let me address myself to each problem separately.

Two sorts of substantive innovation in the school curriculum were evident in my travels. In the public schools of Texarkana, Arkansas, there was an experiment in using new instructional methods and educational hardware in a dropout prevention program. Although I am skeptical about reliance on technological hardware for educational purposes, I must say that my observations indicated that students who use individual slide projectors and audio players in conjunction with programmed film and audio strips appear to be working industriously and enjoying what they are doing. Also, the utilization of these new technologies in Texarkana allowed the dropout prevention program to deal with each student's problems on an individual basis. The effectiveness of the dropout prevention program in Texarkana is yet to be demonstrated scientifically; however, tentative statistical information seems to indicate that it is effective in preventing dropouts: out of 6500 students in grades seven through twelve, there were 194 dropouts during the present academic year; however in the dropout prevention program itself, only two students out of over 400 participating in the program have dropped out.

Another example of curriculum innovation is that of the Bi-Cultural/Bi-Lingual Follow-Through Program in Cucamonga, California. This program, originated by Professor Manuel Ramirez of the University of California at Riverside, offers to a school district with a majority of Chicano students a curriculum built around both English and Spanish language and culture as equally important components. Courses are taught in both languages for all students. Materials relating Anglo culture to Chicano culture are being developed. This program accepts cultural diversity as a guiding principle and draws on the rich heritages of both English and Chicano Americans as teaching tools.

These innovative programs are examples of possibilities for substantive educational change. However, each program has encountered problems and each contains drawbacks. For example, the Texarkana district has learned that hardware in and for itself is not especially helpful; their first supplier of hardware for learning systems had a very snappy individual learning unit but had dubious course materials to be run through the hardware. Quality of program is more important than quality of physical equipment. And the bi-lingual/bi-cultural program in Cucamonga, though not encountering any unusual problems other than those expected in a

research and development project, has yet to demonstrate that it is applicable in a situation other than a small rural school district. The techniques of bi-lingual/bi-cultural instruction have yet to be tried in an urban setting. One promising characteristic of both the Texarkana and Cucamonga programs is that their staffs recognize their own problems and limitations and are attempting to deal with them.

The second general problem -- how can one redesign the organization of the school itself in order to promote education -- is being met in a number of different ways in the cities which I visited. The Parkway School in Philadelphia is an excellent example of a new school design: there is no single school unit. Parkway is known as the school of the streets, because there is not one school building. Instead, students at Parkway attend classes all over the city. Basements of churches, art rooms in museums, and artists' workshops have become the classrooms. And, to some degree, Parkway is a school without a full time faculty. There is a core faculty for each unit of the school (Parkway is presently made up of three units of faculty and staff for about 180 students each), but most of the courses listed in the unit catalogues are taught by people from outside the school: for example, a course called "Sex Education--Social Relationship" was taught by the staff of Planned Parenthood of Philadelphia. A course on public education was offered by the staff of the Citizens Committee on Public Education in Philadelphia.¹ The community as a whole has been used as a curriculum resource by the Parkway School. The additional faculty is made up of interested community persons who teach one or two courses on a volunteer basis. In addition, the older students teach younger students; and college students act as teaching assistants to established faculty members.

Yet there are difficulties: the Parkway School has found it very difficult to manage the community resources in an efficient manner. Developing new resources and evaluating existing components has been very haphazard. Only recently has there been a person with line responsibility to undertake these two tasks. And at that there is only one person. A school of the streets creates management problems which exist though they often are hidden in traditional schools. With the Parkway School planning to expand to deal with 15,000 students, educational management becomes a major problem to be dealt with.

A change in traditional operating procedures is also evident in the Texarkana dropout prevention project. There the program is being run not by teachers employed directly by the school district, but it is instead being operated by the Educational Development Laboratory, a division of McGraw-Hill, as contractor hired by the school district. EDL is not paid on the basis of hours taught or years of experience but is compensated according to the actual performance of the students when they leave the program. This "performance contracting" is an attempt to establish objective criteria by which to evaluate the learning experiences of students and to tie reward to the accomplishment of these objectives.

1. Parkway Program Course Catalogue, Community Alpha, Philadelphia, 1971.

The problems not only of performance contracting but also of experimentation without adequate knowledge and planning are illustrated by the Texarkana experience. The first contractor under the performance contracting agreement -- Dorsett Educational Systems -- took advantage of the school district. The contract between Dorsett and the district stated that the district would test students before and after the term and would pay Dorsett a certain dollar amount for each student who achieved at least one-year's improvement, more for those who improved more, and nothing for those who did not improve. When the school district was giving the final examination to ascertain the achievement of each student, one of the students told the school district examiner: "Oh no, not the submarine example again. I have seen that so many times!" After some inquiry the school district examiner discovered that the students had seen a number of examples on the final examination prior to the test. Dorsett had taught to the test. So the final examination was not an objective and independent evaluation of what the students had achieved. However, because of an inadequate contract and lax administration, the school system had already paid out over \$100,000 to the contractor. The Texarkana school district was not prepared to deal with the sophisticated problems created by their sophisticated strategy for reorganizing the schools. It should be noted that this year the Texarkana schools improved the administration, and it appears that EDL is providing a sound learning program.

The Bi-Lingual/Bi-Cultural experiment in Cucamonga has also experimented with new ways of organizing the school unit: it has involved parents of children in the schools in the actual learning experiences. Parents are trained along with students and teachers in the techniques for educating Spanish speaking children. Family is considered to be an important adjunct to the school.

Another example of new roles within the schools is found in the William Lloyd Garrison School in the South Bronx of New York City. The changing relationship of the school with the community has involved the creation of new professional roles. One of the teachers at the school has been assigned full time to be community relations liaison; this faculty member's sole responsibility is to develop and maintain cordial relationships between those in the community and those in the schools. Even more, this community liaison coordinator has started to develop the resources of the neighborhood as resources for the school.

I should observe that it is my impression that these experiments in changing the structure and organization of the school unit are rarer than experiments in changing the substance of the curriculum. If this impression is correct, then devising new ways of organizing individual schools is an important frontier which has not been adequately explored; and innovation at this level could have a profound impact on the schools.

The final problem of interest is that of rearranging the manner in which public schools are governed. The most far reaching yet at the same time traditional attempt to reorganize governance is the decentralization of the New York City schools. There they are attempting to break down a large city into more manageable units related to a series of smaller

communities. This attempt is traditional in that it puts the urban parent, student, and citizen in a role much like that of their suburban counterparts. I have a personal interest in the decentralization process, because I was involved in an investigation of the problems of decentralization in New York during the difficulties at I.S.201 and Ocean Hill-Brownsville in 1968-69. There the promise of decentralization was often obscured by the problems. However, during my recent tour, I visited decentralized District Number 7 in the South Bronx and was able to see that the promises were overcoming the problems.

After discussions with faculty, students, principals, community people and Board of Education personnel, it appears to me that the decentralization of the New York City Schools has profoundly changed the distribution of power and control. An example of this reallocation of power can be seen in the experience of the city in dealing with the financial crisis of early March, 1971: at that time the central Board of Education thought it would be \$40 million in debt by the end of the fiscal year unless it undertook a drastic policy of economy. The Board indicated that it would put a freeze on all hiring, fire all substitute teachers, and effect other economy measures. In fact, the Board was unable to execute most of these policy measures, for the reorganization of the New York City Schools vested hiring policy (within limits set by the examination system) and most other operational decision making power in the thirty local boards. People out in the decentralized districts and at 110 Livingston Street (the Board of Education) frankly acknowledged that the local boards would not have followed such a directive from the central board. The unreality of the central board's stated policy led to a massive political outcry which united factions in New York City which had not spoken to each other for over four years. This public response led the City government to find the needed funds to meet the crisis (although the funds were "borrowed" against next year's budget; a questionable accounting procedure). Even if the central Board had wished to implement its policies -- and there are indications that it knew all along they could not be implemented -- it would not have actually had the legislative authority or political power to do so.

Community control is indeed a fact in New York City: the only issue is what community is in control in any given district. In the local district which I visited, the ethnic distribution was: a majority of Puerto Ricans, a large minority of Blacks, and a smaller minority of whites. The local governing board includes representatives from each ethnic community. The Local Board President and the local District Superintendent indicated that despite some disagreements among the various groups, there has been a great deal of cooperation. There appeared to be none of the bitterness which had characterized Ocean Hill-Brownsville and IS201 in 1968-9. There is still a legacy of insecurity among administrators and teachers about the impact of community control on their careers; but in the long run, one can expect this insecurity to disappear.

Community control and decentralization in New York City is in a process of evolution: the next logical step includes investing more real budgetary authority in the hands of local boards and superintendents, and, at the same time, developing even smaller decentralized divisions with some authority over curriculum and personnel. Community control does not as yet extend to the individual school. Also, new techniques are needed to

protect the rights of all those participating in the system. Decentralizing control and at the same time protecting the rights of individuals in the system are the two competing elements in the reorganization of school governance. The challenge is to deal with both in a way which maintains the flexibility which seems to be creeping into the New York schools after many decades of inflexible bureaucracy.


Another example of changing relationships between the community and the schools is the learning center in South Boston. This center was founded by a group of community people as an attempt to provide a place for students and community persons to go after school. The Learning Center was originally funded by a federal grant funneled through the Boston Public Schools to a neighborhood group. The original design of the Learning Center intended to provide a common meeting ground for community, students, and teachers. In fact it has not done that. But it has provided additional resources for students in the area, as well as an example of a free learning environment for teachers who bring their students to the Learning Center during the school day. In addition, it has provided a community center for parents in the community to come with their children to learn how to improve their children's performance in school. And the future promises the possibility of actually providing occasions for teachers, students, and community to meet and discuss their problems; that is if the Center can find continuing funding. The Boston School District cut off its funding. Next year it will be operating on a discretionary grant from the U.S. Office of Education. But at least the community continues to control one learning institution in Boston.

Another and quite different example of innovation in school government is the City of Nashville and Davidson County -- Metropolitan Nashville, where the governing unit for both city and county are one. Metropolitan Nashville is the only truly integrated governmental umbrella for urban, suburban, and rural areas in the United States. The exact impact of this organization on the operation of the schools is not at all clear; although the citizens and officials of Nashville are quite proud of it. However, this arrangement obviously provides the potential for dealing with a number of problems which afflict other metropolitan areas in the United States. For example, in dealing with desegregation, the Metropolitan Nashville area will have community resources within its control to integrate the system; that is, if it has the will. Also, for Metropolitan Nashville taxing power extends over the central city, the suburbs, and rural areas. This means that the suburbanites who use the resources of the central city must also bear their costs -- a novelty in American education.

All of these experiments indicate some promise in dealing with many of the important problems facing contemporary American school systems; however, it is depressing to see how isolated these experiments are. Only New York City has decentralized and given the first step toward meaningful community control; only a handful of districts have developed bi-lingual, bi-cultural programs; there is only one metropolitan school system; only one school has really become a school without walls. The challenge for American education is not only to develop new approaches to these problems

but also to develop new strategies for implementing promising techniques on a large scale in the most efficient and effective manner. To this point I shall return in my next newsletter. Also, in the continuation of this report, I shall comment on the problems of higher education in the United States and then conclude with an analysis of existing strategies for change.

Yours sincerely,



Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

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March	10	Los Angeles - Claremont Colleges
	11	Texarkana - Experiment in performance contracting
	12	Little Rock, Arkansas
	13	
	14	Nashville - Metropolitan government
	15	New York City
	16	- Decentralized District 7
	17	- International Center for Educational Development
	18	- College for Human Services
	19	- New York City School Board Offices
	20	New Haven - Conversations at Yale
	21	
	22	Amherst - Hampshire College
	23	Boston - Kennedy Institute of Politics, South Boston Learning Center
	24	- Commune
	25	Philadelphia - Parkway School
	26	Washington, D.C. - A.I.D., American Association of Universities
	27	- Office of the U.S. Commissioner of Education
	28	New York/Los Angeles
May	12	Cucamonga, California - Bi-Cultural/Bi-Lingual School Experiment

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