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IJS-41 VOUCHERS AT ALUM ROCK:
 PROMISE BUT NOT PANACEA

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Mr. Richard Nolte
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

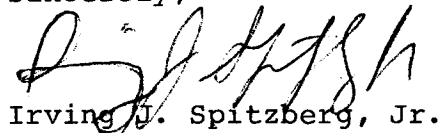
Attached you will find a report on the voucher experiment in Alum Rock, California. In this experiment, parents are given certificates which they can use to purchase education for their children from district schools. But, as you will see from the report, this characteristic of the experiment is only one innovation among many; and perhaps less important than the decentralization of authority to the classroom teacher and the local school.

The report is more than an account of the experiences at Alum Rock. It continues a critique of educational experimentation which has been a consistent theme in my newsletters. It also repeats a leitmotif of my continuing criticism: the importance of decentralizing educational decision-making in order to enhance the professional role of the teacher and to involve the parents and the students.

This newsletter is the result of a transcontinental tour of American educational experiments which I undertook during the first week of December, 1973. My purpose was to reacquaint myself with American experimental practices and to compare the latest trends here with my observations abroad.

Although this report does not offer formal comparisons, I am confident that the foreign readers who look over your shoulder will see the comparisons to be made. And the critique itself is the product of earlier comments on experiments in other countries.

Sincerely,



Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

Professor Spitzberg is an Institute Fellow concerned with educational policy and innovation.

VOUCHERS AT ALUM ROCK: PROMISE BUT NOT PANACEA

Most countries are now chockfull of interesting and exciting educational experiments; but few of these experiments attempt to deal with fundamental characteristics of whole educational systems. The modesty of most experiments is a condition for their impotence in dealing with the overall systemic context in which they operate and an explanation for their usual failures. The voucher experiment at Alum Rock is an exception.

This experiment in the Alum Rock Elementary School District near San Jose, California has a number of unique characteristics: its use of vouchers-certificates which represent a share of the district's tax money, which are given to parents to be spent at any school in the district; its use of compensatory financing for low income families to supplement the vouchers; its decentralization of control over the educational program to the local teachers in the school. But it is the sum of these innovations which is most interesting and also its scale: more than half of the students and teachers in the school district are participating in the strands of experimentation which are contained in the fabric called the voucher program. This is an exercise in systemic change.

Much has been written about vouchers, both pro and con. The basis of the idea is implicit in the free market theories of Adam Smith. The modern intellectual patron of the scheme is the Chicago economist Milton Friedman. Friedman suggests that instead of using taxes to support a public school system, the tax money should be redistributed to the parents who could then purchase education for their children in the open market. This arrangement would allow the forces of the market to accomplish their magic and guarantee the most efficient allocation of educational resources and insure maximum freedom and individual choice: it would also improve the product of education.

The critics of vouchers have challenged both theory and practice. The critical theoreticians have suggested that the private market model has never in fact provided a helpful paradigm for distributing public goods and that education is a quintessential public good with a public value as great or greater than its private value.

The model of economic choice which is the cornerstone of the voucher market model is not appropriate as a model for parent and/or student participation in the decision making process about education, although this model has been accepted by all those who view education as a consumer item. Decisions about educational

policy are important political decisions which require a framework of continuing accountability and individual participation in the whole process of education. This emphasis on the continuing exercise of authority and responsibility by all of the participants in the educational process is quite different from the consumption and market model which views decision as a series of discrete choices to buy or not to buy a product and/or a service.

Those who have criticized the problems of implementing a voucher system have focused on two points: first, a pure market economy would not in any way guarantee the equality of the allocation of educational resources in a real world where the base of competition is quite unequal; and second and related, the problem of racial segregation in urban areas would probably be exacerbated by the pure freedom of choice of the voucher ideal.

Many of the implementation criticisms have been met in full-fledged proposals for implementing voucher systems. In the proposal prepared by Christopher Jencks and his colleagues at the Center for the Study of Public Policy, all of these problems were addressed. And most of the criticisms have been met in the actual experiment at Alum Rock: but met, I would argue, by experimenting in an area where some of the problems would be less severe and by adding innovations which stand logically apart from vouchers.

I. THE DISTRICT BACKGROUND

Before turning to the details of the voucher experiment at Alum Rock it will be helpful to appreciate the socio-economic and historical context which this district near San Jose California provides. The Alum Rock Elementary School District has 25 schools covering the years K-8. Its population is approximately 50% Spanish, 35% Anglo, 12% Black, and the remainder Oriental and American Indian. In 1972-73 the average cost of educating a primary grade child was \$787.96 and \$1,041 for a middle school child. The area is one with large numbers of rural and suburban poor.

The Board of Education in Alum Rock has a reputation for being quite conservative. And in the 60's the District operated as a very centralized decision making system: the story told about the French Minister of Education -- that he knew what was going on in every classroom in France at every hour of every day in every subject -- could have described the situation in Alum Rock. However, in the late 60's the District hired an adventurous superintendent, Mr. William J. Jefferds, who wanted to change dramatically the education system.

It was in this context that the new Superintendent, Mr. Jefferds, attended a discussion about vouchers sponsored by one of Jencks' representatives. Jefferds became a convert and invited Mr. Jencks' group in to help him develop a feasibility study. The suggestion that the district "go voucher" prompted a great deal of discussion and disagreement. But after an extended political dialogue the District entered into an agreement with the office of Economic Opportunity to undertake a voucher experiment, which was to be implemented in 1972-73.

II. THE EXPERIMENTS

What is called the voucher experiment at Alum Rock is in fact a combination of different experiments tied together by the voucher string. The voucher component of the system is relatively straight forward and involves 13 of the 25 schools. The voucher works by giving each parent a certificate equivalent to \$850.82 for primary children and \$1,074.94 for middle school children. This amount is then reduced to \$552.15 and \$757.36 at the local building level because of a tithe used to support central services such as transportation and administrative operations. Each parent is given three choices ranked according to parental preference among the various mini-school programs, which constitutes the basic choice. If the parent submits his form by a certain date he is guaranteed his first choice or at least one of the three. Thereafter, the choice is given among remaining possibilities.

An important aspect of the voucher system is the availability of information for parents so that they may make informed decisions. To provide this information Alum Rock has a team of 13 parent counselors available to assist the parents of the approximately 9,000 participating students. These counselors are parents drawn from the community and then trained by the voucher office and supported by two professional counselors. In addition to their information distribution role, these counselors serve as a bridge between the schools and the parents and as ombudsmen on behalf of the parents.

The parents are also served by a research and evaluation unit located in the central administration. The director of research and evaluation, Mr. Richard Reyes, sees his task as almost exclusively that of serving parents. He has prepared a detailed series of evaluation procedures which are presently being considered by parents and teachers. Last year he provided some parent survey information to the parents before they chose their children's schools this year but did not make his findings public. Mr. Reyes indicated that he would be willing to assist local teachers in the school in using evaluation techniques, but clearly said that his services would have to be re-

quested by them. His sole active responsibility is serving the parents.

Parents who come from lower socio-economic categories are given compensatory vouchers for their children. Those children who qualify for Federal standards for free school lunches are given one-third more for their vouchers. This increment is financed by the Office of Economic Opportunity. The purpose of this low income bonus, which was central to the Jencks proposal, is to encourage schools to tailor their offerings for this neglected constituency. No school is allowed to charge more for its education. The maximum charge is set by the regular voucher with the compensatory section considered to be a bonus.

In addition to these components which make up the voucher element of the experiments, there are a number of other innovations operating in the Alum Rock District which have been part of the overall reform but which are not logically related to the voucher system.

The most important single innovation in the whole Alum Rock enterprise is the decentralization of authority to the classroom teacher and/or teams thereof. Each school participating in the voucher program is divided into at least two mini-schools, each of which offers a different educational program. Some of the larger schools have as many as four mini-schools. Each mini-school has a team of at least two teachers offering a distinctive program. Under the mini-school plan, the teachers design and implement their own curricula and also make many decisions about how money is spent on supplies and classroom activities. This control over resources does not include teachers' salaries; but most other expenditures are in the hands of the classroom teachers.

Each mini-school is advised by a parent committee. The requirement for such a committee was, interestingly enough, suggested by the teachers' union president. The voucher staff had wanted to leave the establishment of such committees to the decision of individual mini-schools responding to the demands of the market. But the school board required each school to establish a committee. The powers and role of such committees vary dramatically among the mini-schools. The overall impact of the parent advisory committees is best illustrated in a comment by a teacher who was comparing the demands of these committees to the pressures of Title I (federal low income school support) parent committees: he said that it was quite a relief when Title I was removed from his school, because under Title I the parents had to approve everything and were always getting in the way. But the new parental advisory committee under the voucher system is just that: advisory. So at this point in time, it is not clear that the combination of vouchers and parent advisory committees has dramatically changed the parental role in the school system: at least not for the better.

The Alum Rock experiment, then, includes the following undertakings: a) the voucher experiment itself; b) a parent information system; c) the decentralization of decision-making to the hands of the teachers; d) and the establishment of parent/advisory committees at the mini-school level. To illustrate how the experiments operate at the level of the school, we may briefly look at the experiences of two schools in Alum Rock.

III. A LOOK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SCHOOLS

A. MCCOLLAM SCHOOL

McCollam School has always had the reputation in Alum Rock as one of the better schools in the District -- a fact which must provide perspective on my comments. When I first visited the school I was immediately struck by the flow of traffic in different wings of the multi-winged, stucco building. Children and teachers seemed to be going about their business in a scheduled but irregular manner: one has a sense of controlled chaos. I later found out that the mini-schools at McCollam had been using a variable scheduling system for some time, which meant different arrival and departure times and different play and work times.

Each wing of McCollam contained one of the four different mini-schools, with all of them sharing an auditorium, playground, and central administration. The four mini-schools at McCollam were: a) enrichment b) Continuous Progress Learning: c) Individualized Learning Program: d) traditional. Each school offered a unique curriculum to its students.

The enrichment mini-school was a holdover from an experimental program providing a special curriculum for talented children which is financed by federal funds. In addition, since the start of the voucher experiment, the mini-school has admitted some self-selected pupils without reference to usual measures of talent. The Continuous Progress Learning mini-school offers, as its name implies, a program of ungraded instruction. The Individualized Learning Program offers a modified open classroom plan with the addition of individualized packaged curriculum materials provided by various American educational companies; this mini-school also has a bi-lingual/bi-cultural emphasis. And the traditional mini-school offers a very structured, graded learning environment not unlike that found in most schools across the country.

The effect of the voucher component of the experiment in the mini-schools at McCollam has not been so great in the eyes of the teachers and administrators there. No teacher indicated any feeling of competition with other mini-schools or other schools. Not one of the mini-schools has actually lost students in the two years, because population has moved into the district. The only minor indication of competition was the comment made by an assistant principal, Mr. Stowall, about his experiences in preparing the curriculum for one of the mini-

schools in his role of a teacher: he said that he had been quite secretive in preparation of the ideas so that no other mini-school could imitate it. The assistant principal also indicated that the distribution of resources among the mini-schools had not changed significantly over time, because enrollment has been steady or increased in the whole school. Although he did indicate that the mini-schools each decided whether or not to contribute to certain school wide resources such as media center and carpeting for common rooms. Indeed the decisions about materials and support facilities such as reading specialist assistance were taken by the mini-schools acting in concert -- decisions which in the past would have been taken by the principal or an administrator at a central office.

But much of this decentralization of decisions over resources is not the result of the voucher component of the experiment but is the effect of the explicit decision to decentralize decision-making in Alum Rock. Indeed, there is decentralization in schools not participating in the voucher experiment.

The results of this process are clearly evident in the McCollam School. Teachers in each of the mini-schools spoke with special pride over their achievements in curriculum innovation. One teacher in the Individualized Learning mini-school talked about the trials and tribulations of designing the new curriculum and about all of the re-education which she herself had to go through to prepare to teach it. But she said that what she was doing was her own design, and she was clearly quite proud of her class and involved in her work. All of the teachers indicated that the new approaches in the mini-school required much more time than their old teaching roles; but without exception they reveled in the demands. And this sense of control over the classroom and the curriculum was enhanced by the way in which the innovations made the teachers open to learning themselves. A teacher in the Continuous Progress Learning mini-school said that during the first year she had tried to involve K-5 in the same learning experiences but had found this to be unworkable. Now this mini-school was using different combinations of ages for different subjects and finding the technique far more effective. Given the charge to develop their own curriculum, the teachers at McCollam have become real innovators and learners themselves.

According to the teachers and assistant principal at McCollam, one of the most important factors in the success of the experiments so far has been the availability of money for additional classroom learning resources such as the media center and curriculum materials. Many teachers indicated that they had wanted to try some of the innovations for years but that it was only recently that they had the money necessary to supply the classrooms; so the secret of many of the innovations was the additional money. But according to Mr. Stowall, the Assistant Principal, the compensatory voucher was not the only and necessarily even the most important source of this new money. Of special significance was a relatively new California program providing additional money for low income students modeled on Title I of the

Federal Elementary and Secondary School Act. When asked to explain the success of any particular experiment at McCollam, the first answer is always: "money!".

The effect of both vouchers and decentralization is illustrated by the fact that each mini-school seems to operate in its own development vacuum. Although there are two or three mini-schools offering individualized learning in different buildings as well as a number of traditional mini-schools, the mini-schools with common emphases do not exchange ideas with each other. There is no mechanism for providing bridges among mini-schools within one physical plant or among mini-schools in different buildings.

When one asks teachers and administrators at the McCollam school about their overall evaluation of the package of experiments known as the voucher program, the response is unanimous: the last couple of years have been the best in the history of the school. But if one asks which component(s) of the experiment accounts for the success, the answer is always confused and ambiguous. This confusion and ambiguity must claim our attention after we consider the experiences of one other school in the District.

B. HUBBARD SCHOOL

The Hubbard School illustrates the innovative forces which were already at work in Alum Rock on the eve of the Voucher program initiative in 1972. It had been participating in a program assisted by a local state college which emphasized individualized learning programs and open plan classroom practice. Indeed the energy which the faculty of Hubbard School had devoted to the process of innovation and re-education in the state college program led the principal and the faculty to delay participation in the voucher experiment until the current year. And now that the school participates in the voucher program, its past history has created subtle differences between its experience and McCollam's.

The three people who deal with the two mini-schools at Hubbard on a continuing basis -- the principal, the media center director, and the reading specialist -- all agreed that the differences between the two mini-schools was strictly those of nuance and personality, not fundamental philosophy and practice. One mini-school is called "Adventures in Learning School" and the other is known as the "Total Experience School." The former stresses attitudes and the latter more skills which can be measured, but the emphasis is certainly no more than one of degree. The teachers in both mini-schools share the tradition of the experience with the experimental program in association with the state college.

An important purpose of the voucher experiment was to create greater parent involvement in the local schools. In addition to the

voucher component, parent advisory committees are required for each mini-school. When asked about the parental involvement in his school, the principal of Hubbard, Mr. Caporale, said that it was still not very great -- indeed not as strong as he would like. He said that he holds conferences with the parents' groups and also attends meetings for parents in parents' homes. But most parents do not attend these meetings. And, according to Mr. Caporale, when he sees parents on a one-to-one basis and asks why they do not attend, they say they have no complaints and are pleased with the school so that they do not see any reason to attend. However, a somewhat different picture of parent/school relations after the introduction of the voucher system was painted by a parent in the area. Before vouchers, according to this parent, the principal at Hubbard was always willing to see parents, but he did not treat them as equals nor did he always devote sufficient time to their needs. But since the initiation of the voucher program in his school, the parents can always have an attentive hearing from him. One would guess that this change may have less to do with the voucher system itself or changes in the attitude of the principal than with the role of parent counselors in the Voucher experiment: these parent counselors spend part of their time in each school dealing with school/parent relations. Having such a person who can provide a communications bridge between parents with cultural backgrounds quite different from the principal and faculty creates a new environment for parent/school relations. However, one must note that the time of the parent counselor is in such demand that this particular bridging function is not served to its optimum, and from the perspective of the local school, the parent counselor is seen as an agent of the central administrative bureaucracy running the voucher experiment, which limits the counselor's effectiveness in dealing with teachers in particular schools.

Although the voucher experiment has been ongoing in Hubbard School for less than an academic year, parents, teachers, and the principal seem to be quite satisfied with the experiment so far.

IV. COMPARISONS

Before drawing any conclusions from the experience of the Alum Rock experiments, it might be helpful to compare this experience with two other enterprises in educational innovation: a bi-cultural/bi-lingual education project in Cucamonga, California and a career education experiment at the Skyline Career Development Center in Dallas, Texas. Both comparisons will indicate the strengths of the Alum Rock undertaking.

The Cucamonga experiment is sponsored by the Federal Follow Through Program in a district not unlike Alum Rock but with more Spanish speaking students. The director, Professor Manuel Ramirez, is a psychologist at the University of California at Riverside, whose research into the learning styles of Mexican-American children has been the basis of the research and curriculum development in the program. The model of educational change has been quite hierarchical: the university team has prepared curriculum materials for the teachers and

has provided close teacher training support. The project has prepared a great deal of published materials which are both bi-cultural and bi-lingual. And the teachers have been trained to be sensitive to reactions of their students (field-sensitive, to use the jargon, rather than field independent) through such sophisticated techniques as video tape review and "bug-in-the-ear" (remote radio) instructions. However, it should be noted that both techniques place the teacher in a relatively subservient position viz a viz the trainer. Indeed the whole curriculum development process, although systematically involving the teacher, casts the teacher in a place at the bottom of a hierarchy and passive in relation to the experts. The philosophy behind the development process is the old and now somewhat tarnished belief that the goal of curriculum development is to create teacher-proof materials.

The curriculum developed in Cucamonga self-consciously integrates the parents of children into the curriculum. Parent counselors are provided and packets are prepared for parents to help them assist their children. This parent involvement is a direct result of research findings that show that Mexican-American children depend very much on their families for support and guidance. But once again the parent involvement is structured by the professional curriculum designers. There has been little parental input into setting specifications for the design process. And this passive parental role has led to a problem about the future of the bi-lingual/bi-cultural program in Cucamonga, because the federal money is being phased out and the local school board is not clearly committed to maintaining the program. Somewhat belatedly the program has started to recognize the political parameters of its task. It is now training its parent counselors to become community organizers and encourage the parents to take an active role in deciding the future of the program. But the belated involvement of the parents does not augur well for the future, because the parents are asked to support a program which has been given to them, not devised by them.

The problem of the relationship between those who are "selling" educational innovations and those who are asked to implement or buy them is also illustrated by the example of the Skyline High School and Career Development Center in Dallas. Of course everything is bigger in Texas, so Skyline is the quintessence of its approach to education on a scale unsurpassed anywhere in the U.S. Skyline was designed to provide a secondary education more "relevant" to the needs of the economy and the student who would have to work in that economy either immediately after graduation or later after a college education. Long before Mr. Nixon's Washington started preaching career education, the Dallas school board decided on a vocational emphasis for its new city-wide high school. The Board hired RCA to design a curriculum for its new school and create a staff. RCA still does all of the curriculum design work for the school: although its work is now overseen by a research and evaluation staff.

To understand the curriculum development model used at Skyline one must keep in mind the vocational emphasis of the Career Development Center, where students from all over Dallas can specialize in subjects ranging from child care and dental technology to aviation mechanics. Most of the teachers were recruited by RCA directly from industry, so they had no experience with teaching nor did they have formal teacher training. The curriculum development personnel are seen as specialists in education helping the substantive expert communicate his knowledge. The process of curriculum development requires that the RCA man deal from the beginning with the appropriate teacher; but the relationship seems to be very much that of the professional dealing with a client (or a boss with his servant), not professional dealing with a colleague. The result of the curriculum development process is a clear set of behavioural objectives ala Benjamin Bloom, which means that the individual teachers are clearly held accountable for the advancement of their students. Indeed the language of management and accountability peppered the remarks of Mr. Burke, the coordinator of curriculum at the Career Development Center. The teacher in this model is an employee held accountable to the boss; the student is the Ford moving down the assembly line. In spite of the obviously negative impressions I had, I must clearly report that the students and teachers I talked to had no complaints whatsoever. Nevertheless, I believe these positive reports must be discounted by the impact of the lavish plant and exciting and glamorous alternatives which the imaginative cluster concept of career education provides the vocationally oriented student. The model of curriculum development at Skyline does not offer a very happy model for improving educational systems.

Although both the Cucamonga project and the Skyline Career Development Center undoubtedly rank among the top of the list of innovations of their sorts in the U.S., both suffer a number of shortcomings as paradigms of educational change: neither represents a systemic attempt at educational reform; neither centers its attempt at curriculum change on the teacher as the responsible and primary party but views her/him as the relatively passive recipient of expert prescriptions; neither involves the parents as active partners in the process of education change. Skyline does not seem to worry about parent involvement at the policy or classroom level at all. The Cucamonga Follow-Through Project has in the past viewed parents as only one more classroom

resource, although this is an improvement on most curriculum projects and is in fact now being transformed into a much more active and systemic involvement for parents.

With the perspective of these two enterprises in educational change, we may more perspicaciously view the problems and prospects of the experiments at Alum Rock and then evaluate their lessons for education systems in the U.S. and abroad.

V. ALUM ROCK: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

When one quizzes Joel Levin, the director of the voucher and associated experiments in Alum Rock, about the current status of the project and the contribution of various components of the experiment to its success or failure, he responds by saying that so far he views the enterprise as successful because of the new sense of parent power created by the use of vouchers. He acknowledges that it is still too early to tell whether or not the voucher component has actually raised reading or math scores, but he believes that the voucher system itself has made teachers respond better to the needs of students as viewed by parents. He also believes that the spirit of competition has forced teachers to improve their performance. He qualifies his competition point by acknowledging that this is no 19th Century Darwinian competition but much more controlled market dynamics -- he uses the analogy of the securities market regulated by the SEC. He strongly claims that on the eve of registration for schools in the spring, the competition is very real among both parents and teachers.

We must remember that the parents, teachers, and administrators whose views were reported earlier indicated a very different perception of the importance of competition: they suggested that the feeling of competition was nil. But their view is constrained by their own self-interest and local situation, just as Levin's view is clearly colored by his and the project's self-interest and more system-wide perspective. One objective fact which tends to favor the parent, teacher and administrators' views is that the district has shown an overall increase in students and the individual schools have not shown a net loss of students, which means that so far the voucher system itself has not been able to test the sanctions of competition, only the rewards of a system which includes compensatory vouchers. In the future the force of competition might be felt in the district, but it is not altogether clear that this force will be positive, because there is every indication that change so far has been constructive without real voucher competition and this

has resulted from cooperation and trust which real competition might destroy.

Related to the issue of competition is the responsiveness of the educational system to the demands of parents as surrogates for their children. It seems clear from the reports that the actual responsiveness of the teachers to parents' demands because of vouchers may be less than on other models of parent participation -- remember the comments on the removal of Title I. And even if this responsiveness has increased, it may be due more to the institution of parent advisory committees at the mini-school level than the voucher design itself. The variation in degree of parent participation from school to school probably reflects different formula of participation in each mini-school, which reinforces the view that vouchers themselves have not made the system more responsive to parents. One could argue, as one teacher did, that if the system were more immediately responsive to parents at this stage of its development, it would not have been nearly so innovative. The teachers acting as sellers developed their products for sale as they wanted to as professionals: the buyers then responded. The force of this latter comment is that the market model encouraged innovation by allowing teachers to experiment without parental interference until after the fact. The impact of this interpretation and its validity may become clearer over time. But at present my impression is that this observation supports the crucial importance of the other major component of the experiment at Alum Rock: the decentralization of decision-making to small teams of teachers at the mini-school level.

The decentralization of the participating schools in the voucher program into mini-schools (also at least one non-voucher school has divided into mini-schools) has been the single most important innovation in the Alum Rock package. Just as the teachers in McCollam indicated, the decentralization has given teachers an opportunity to try their ideas (and the extra money has given them the necessary resources). Teachers see themselves as now responsible for what happens in their classrooms and in their whole mini-schools: therefore they act as responsible professionals.

Of course this decentralization is not without its problems. At present each mini-school acts as an independent entity without any real attempt at cooperation with other mini-schools with similar programs or without any undertaking to learn from very different mini-schools. Part of this problem arises from the positive pride of the mini-schools in their own autonomy and invention: what Joel Levin calls the benefit of the small business mentality with its pride in self-invention. But the problem is real: there are no bridges of communication among the various educational entities. The central district coordinators and resource people are seen as supervisors and a healthy scepticism about such people is the legacy of the former centralized system. At present the wheel is being reinvented many times over with great duplication and wasted effort. New bridging institutions need to be developed in decentralized Alum Rock. The British

Teacher Center model might be appropriate; and also perhaps the consultancy model offered by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. But even with the problems, the mini-school decentralization in Alum Rock offers a helpful model to all school systems; and the model is not logically dependent upon acceptance of the voucher experiment.

A problem which Alum Rock is about to face is an implication of the market model of the voucher system: a group of people outside of the existing Alum Rock system want to establish a school called Gro-Kids. This school does not differ dramatically in program from existing schools: but there is a constituency of non-certified teachers and parents which wants to try its hand. The problem of creating new sellers in the market of a public system is complicated by the fear of the teachers' union about the threat to the egalitarian controls of the public system. Within the near future there may be an important political disagreement about the future of the whole enterprise because of the entry of Gro-Kids into the experiment in January. But it appears that those who fear private competitors using public money might be able to compromise with the pure market proponents by establishing controls through the school board over use of plant and certification, both of which are required by state law. The controlled entry of new institutions seems to be an important component of the voucher model which could be useful in other systems; but it is critical that this entry be regulated to prevent higher charges and segregation by race and economic status. Price control is a necessary condition of maintaining equal access -- a condition as crucial as it is unpalatable to the pure market theorist. In the context of Alum Rock it is quite likely that the compromise solution will be found, because both board and union are pleased with the current status of the experiment and wish to see it succeed.

The wish to succeed is another important factor in the Alum Rock collection of experiments -- what social scientists sometime call the Hawthorne effect. Experimenters tend to find what they are looking for. And when one has a number of experiments going on, the whole system develops an innovative elan. Another factor at work in the system, which is related to this experimental effect, is the reconsideration of fundamental issues which accompanies any large scale, systemic change. Although the various experiments in the voucher program involve only half the schools, these schools are completely involved. And the implementation of the experiments, especially the mini-school decentralization, has provided an occasion for each teacher, pupil, and parent to evaluate seriously the whole educational system. Such occasions are invariably beneficial.

Overall the prospects for Alum Rock are quite bright. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to attempt to extract the lessons which the Alum Rock experience might teach other educational systems. To this task we must in conclusion turn.

CONCLUSION

Evaluating the bundle of experiments at Alum Rock at this point in time is no easy task: one cannot help but wonder how the Rand Corporation, which has been retained by the National Institute of Education, and the internal evaluator will actually go about the job. The confluence of decentralization to mini-schools and the influx of new money with the undertaking of the voucher enterprise will make it very difficult indeed to isolate the factors which account for either success or failure in reaching various educational goals. One point is obvious: anyone who evaluates will have to use a whole range of measures including but not limited to the usual cognitive indices of achievement. In this environment the affective changes in children, parents, and teachers are probably most important.

My own impression, as I have stated a number of times earlier in this essay, is that the voucher arrangement itself is the least important of the factors influencing change for the better in the Alum Rock district. It is the process of decentralization to mini-schools and the diverse program of educational activities offered by schools in the same general neighborhood which is the most important innovation. The impact of the whole mini-school movement on teachers and parents is spectacular and obvious to even the most casual visitor. And this decentralization is in no way predicated on the voucher system: any freedom of choice arrangement would do. The critical change has been vesting of authority and power in the hands of small groups of teachers.

The director of the voucher experiment, Dr. Joel Levin, strenuously argues the importance of the free market competition created by the voucher scheme. As reported earlier others disagree. My own impression is that in so far as there is competition at the moment it is competition of pride not competition for resources. This competition is constructive and has been self-consciously moderated by all participants. But even this competition has had some cost in the fact that there is a lack of communication among those dealing with similar problems in similar ways.

One problem that many critics of vouchers raise is that of the contribution of such a system to social, racial, and economic segregation. In fact this has not happened in Alum Rock. But the reasons are clear: Alum Rock has a heterogeneous population living near each other in an area which is relatively small, so that the busing furnished by the program gives everyone an opportunity of free choice without high cost in terms of money or inconvenience. There is no reason to expect the voucher form of freedom of choice to work better in large, urban areas with extensive racial segregation than any other similar system has in the past. So I would expect a voucher freedom of choice plan to increase segregation in segregated areas, regardless of the controls built into the system. However, freedom of choice within larger schools through a mini-school arrangement

need not increase segregation if socio-economic quotas are maintained.

Another institutional lesson in Alum Rock, which dramatically affects the system and from which many can learn, is the provision of parent counselors. The communication system which these counselors create allows parents to make informed judgments in conjunctions with their children. Although Alum Rock has yet to take the next step: making the parent advisory councils important forces in the system.

The one final factor in the mix of influences on the system in Alum Rock is the one most credited by teachers for their seeming success in the district: increased money to be spent at the classroom level. I, like most critics, am skeptical about the claim that one can buy quality. But when one is examining a district which was previously (in terms of per capita expenditure) one of the poorest in California, then the claim that the extra money has been most important does deserve some consideration, because its marginal value is so great. Yet even in Alum Rock the real key is not the additional money but that it is being spent at the classroom level, a result for which vouchers can claim some credit but for which the decentralization process deserves the greatest praise.

Before I visited Alum Rock I was quite skeptical about the claims made for the voucher system; but I was just as cold eyed toward those critics who rejected it out of hand. After having visited the experiment, I now see no problem whatsoever in undertaking voucher programs in areas where the problems of racial segregation are not acute. And no matter what the socio-racial composition of the area, the decentralization framework provided by the mini-schools is a model which can be readily adopted and adapted with the prospect of great results. Also, in both the voucher and decentralization framework, the example of the parent education program in Alum Rock sets a standard which every district could and should emulate.

The best of the future may not yet be the present in Alum Rock -- but some of the guidelines are there.

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