DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 021 937 UD 006 446

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY: A CONFERENCE (NEW YORK STATE UNIVERSITY, BUFFALO, SEPTEMBER 23, 1967).

State Univ. of New York, Buffalo.
Spons Agency-Buffalo Board of Education, N.Y.; Buffalo Chamber of Commerce, N.Y.
Pub Date 23 Sep 67
Note-16p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.72
Descriptors-BUS TRANSPORTATION, COMPENSATORY EDUCATION, CONFERENCE REPORTS, *EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, EDUCATIONAL PARKS, EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS, EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, *EQUAL EDUCATION, *METROPOLITAN AREAS, PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS, SCHOOL INTEGRATION, STUDENT ATTITUDES, *SUBURBS, URBAN AREAS

During a 1-day conference addresses were presented on equal educational opportunities in cities and suburbs and on various plans, proposals, and programs for achieving quality integrated education. Discussion groups at the conference were concerned with such issues as a definition of equality, metropolitan approaches to educational problems, and the value of educational parks. Other groups discussed the attitudes of suburban children, compensatory education, parochial schools, and busing plans. Summary remarks about the meeting could not point to any clearcut conclusion about the value of the conference to the participants. (NH)

EQUALITY of EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

a conference
23 September 1967
Norton Union
State U. of N.Y.
Buffalo

What the best and wisest parent wants
for his own children,
that is the education the community should provide
for all its children.
Any other ideal is dangerous and unlovely;
acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

The School and Society
John Dewey 1899

pictures by A E Woolley

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

On the 23rd of September, 1967, more than two hundred persons gathered in the student union of the State University of New York at Buffalo. They came together, as concerned individuals, to hear what a group of experts had to say on the problems of equal educational opportunities. They also came together to speak their own minds on these and related problems. The words and pictures that follow chronicle the events of that day.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND REALITY

The first session of the day was a pair of addresses: Dr. David Cohen, of the Joint Center for Urban Studies for MIT and Harvard spoke on "Equality of Opportunity in American Cities and Suburbs;" and Dr. Max Wolff, of the Center for Urban Education in New York City spoke on "Suburbia--Education for Reality?"

Dr. Cohen described metropolitan cooperation as an area of increasing concern for communities like Buffalo. Whether that is the answer to problems of equal opportunity, he said, can be determined in part by applying to it three questions designed to test any policy: is it workable? is it possible? is it right?

In deciding whether metropolitan cooperation is workable, Cohen said, we must consider the alternatives -- in this case, "a proliferation of school juristictions of widely varying school populations." Patterns of population movement he explained, have been clear: whites moving out of the cities, and negroes moving in. The people moving have been young adults, people of child-bearing age. That means the number of negroes in the city will increase proportionally, as will the number of whites in the suburbs.

Therefore, Cohen argued, racial and social inequalities cannot be righted simple by improving education. The schools, attendance, and district boundaries must also be taken into consideration. We must not, he said, "confuse improvement of education with provision of equal opportunity."

The cost of metropolitan planning also makes it workable, Dr. Cohen said. He indicated it would cost less than would be needed to bring students in existing schools up to academic standards, through special intensified programs in their schools.

Is metropolitan cooperation possible? In answering, Cohen said we must recognize as myths some of the standard arguments against cooperation--the myth about decline in white student achievement, the myth about deterioration of discipline, the myth about people moving out of the district to escape. The facts are that people do not move away from a good school, and that students achievement and discipline do not diminish in integrated situations.

And is metropolitan cooperation morally right? At this point, Dr. Cohen admitted to "some discouragement about talking in abstract terms--theories are abstract, but children are real, and the children, not the theories, are our basic concern.

"When we have policies and practices under which children are being denied opportunity," he said in conclusion, "then I think it is important for us to devise policies and practices under which they can grow and prosper."

It is only natural, Dr. Wolff began, for parents to see their children as bright hopes for the future, and to do everything they can to protect that bright hope from any outside forces. But we must face reality: we must admit that chances are the child will not become "the great light of the world;" and we must admit that the child will meet and have to live with outside forces.

And suburbia (where Dr. Wolff himself lives) is part of society, it is reality. We may try, in suburbia, to escape reality. Building walls around our children, however, in suburbia or anywhere else, does not protect them from the world, Dr. Wolff said, because the children must encounter reality sooner or later.

In fact, he implied, we do our children a greater service letting them come in contact with other people, different people, while they still are in school. The children from outside our immediate neighborhood have valuable contributions to make to the real world our children grow up in.

Neighborhood schools will continue, Dr. Wolff said. They are where "children become acquainted with the reality of the people who live in their community." Three problems always come up with mention of an educational park, Dr. Wolff said: size, bussing, and cost. "As for size," he said, "the problem is not the number, it is the American genius to organize such an institution." The educational park will be broken down into small sub-units, each with an identity of its own.

"Because we have no real, good reason to speak against bussing," Dr. Wolff said, we may invent objections. For example, complaints about the safety of bussing are unrealistic: millions of students ride busses now without any trouble. Statistics indicate children are much safer on buses than they are walking home from school.

How much does an educational park cost? No more, said Dr. Wolff, than it would cost to build, as separate units, a first class elementary school, a first class junior or middle school, and a first class high school. And the cost will be less, "far less, if you compare it in addition with curriculum improvements, which are far better in an educational park."

Begin all this, Wolff said, by building educational parks. We must make people say, despite whatever problems are connected with attendance, "The school is such a first-class school, I want my child to go there."

EVERYONE GETS INTO THE ACT

During the morning, and again during the afternoon, the conference broke up into a number of small discussion groups, each group intended to consider one particular aspect of the over-all problem of equality.

GROUP 1, What is human equality?

Chairman: Rev. Robert Sweeney
St. Brigid's Church

Consultant: Dr. George Blair
Center on Innovation
New York State Education Dept.

Members of the group found two distinct approaches to the question of equality: provide special help for the deprived, to bring them up; or eliminate discrimination and let everyone develop as best he can without extra help. Most people seemed clearly to favor the first, though a few people argued that it is morally wrong to show preferred treatment to a deprived group, because that amounted to discrimination against the advantaged group.

It was also argued that parochial schools were guilty of de facto segregation; Catholics in the group agreed, saying it could hardly be considered surprising, considering how few negroes locally are Catholic.

Inequality is a condition of our society, it was said, and the younger the targets of any program to overcome inequality, the better the chances for success in that program. On the practical level, it was suggested that, for maximum effectiveness, human relations programs should reach children even before the kindergarten level.

The group agreed generally on four steps which might improve educational opportunities: find more money and be willing to spend it; provide small classes, good equipment, and well-prepared teachers; educate the community, as well as the students; integrate as many schools as possible.

GROUP 2, Metropolitan Approaches to Educational Problems

Chairman: Dr. Caryl Hedden
Buffalo State University College

Consultant: Dr. Brock Rideout
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

The group quickly admitted that inequality exists, but could not agree whether equality would be achieved simply by improving the present system. Bussing, introduced as a possible solution for school imbalance, aroused predictably strong, and mixed reaction. Whether through bussing or some other means, the group decided, the negro concentration of city schools will have to be cut. There was no implication in this that negro schools are inferior because negroes attend them; the point was rather that attitudes toward learning are tied to socio-economic status and background, and that negroes form a disproportionally large percentage of the poorer classes.

The Toronto Metropolitan plan was described by Dr. Rideout. Considerable interest was shown in his argument that the metro concept does not necessarily mean centralization; it can mean decentralization in some places. He pointed out that the trend has been to let decision-making be kept as close as possible to the level affected by the decisions.

Work at the highest possible governmental level, the group concluded, was essential to any plan for equalizing educational opportunities.

GROUP 3, Educational Parks

Chairman: Mr. Jack Bunis - Vice Pres.
Buffalo Area Chamber of Commerce

Consultant: Dr. Frank Barry
Superintendent of Schools
Syracuse

The problem of opportunity, the group felt, centers in the economic structure of society, and not in the schools. It was admitted, however, that the schools do offer one convenient approach to solving the problem.

Two questions dominated the discussion of education parks -- whether and how? Opponents argued that the population of Erie County (only eight percent non-white) did not indicate a serious integration problem. At the other extreme, some proponents said the parks should be set up on a compulsory basis, so that the parks themselves do not become segregated.

Educational parks were seen by many as inevitable because of the need to improve education for all; the only question was whether or not they would be integrated. Although the parks do offer a wide range of facilities, not everyone was convinced they would be worth the price.

The conclusion of the group, a majority but not a unanimous report, were that parks will come eventually; and that a metropolitan-

scale effort will be needed, with strong leadership both in the schools and in the community.

GROUP 4, Educational Parks

Chairman: Dr. Robert Rossberg
State University of N.Y. at Buffalo

Consultant: Dr. Max Wolff
Research Sociologist
Center for Urban Education

Buffalo schools, someone suggested, are not as bad as they are pictured. In fact, they are generally good, inequality of opportunity notwithstanding. The need to impress this fact on others, it was felt, is a large part of overcoming suburban parents' objections to sending their children to future parks in or near the city. Buffalo residents thought the situation locally was worsened by suburban reluctance to help the city our of a problem which does not seem to affect the suburbs.

Unless the suburbs are reached, it was said, any programs are bound to fail. The success of educational parks will depend on getting into them students from all strata of society. One way to accomplish this may be to build good-middle-class housing in the city, to attract back many who have moved to the suburbs.

In answer to worries that the educational park would radically change the institution of education, several participants said that the parks are simply tools to work with in education, they are not methods of education.

By providing better education, the group decided, educational parks could attract cooperation. Parents would be willing to send their children, even by bus, to reach schools better than the ones in the neighborhood.

GROUP 5. *Suburban Children's Attitudes*

Chairman *Mrs. William G. Rusch*

Consultant: *Mr. Charles Kockheiser*
Teacher
Brighton High School

The ability to benefit from school experience was tied strongly to the home environment. And, because of natural isolation factors in the educational structure, neither city nor suburban schools were seen adequate to provide opportunities for their students to know and learn to respect people from a wide variety of social, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

A heated debate broke out over who is responsible for the present decaying system in city schools. Persons from the suburbs accused the city dwellers of failing to handle their problems effectively, while the city dwellers charged that suburbanites were running away from the problem. As the debate subsided, both sides seemed to realize that, whatever the

blame, a problem does exist, and a solution must be found.

The best way to develop wholesome attitudes among children, it was said, is to provide direct experience for them. Human contact is the most effective kind of lesson for all students.

The majority opinion of the group resolved in two points -- the educational park is the best way now to solve the problem of human contacts, better than bussing students to the suburbs; and and human relations should be taught as early and as effectively as possible.

GROUP 6, Compensatory Education

Chairman: Dean Robert Simpson
Buffalo State University College

Consultant: Mrs. Dorothy Jones
Office of Church and Race
Protestant Council of
the City of New York

One of the first ideas brought up was that equality of educational opportunity does not exist anywhere. Many agreed with this point, but succeeding discussion of inequality in housing and employment led to accusations that the school's role in equality was being exaggerated. The reply was that the focus must be someplace, a beginning must be made someplace -- what better place for that than education?

The cost of education, it was said, is determined not by the price of what is done, but by the consequences of what is not done. The schools may not be able to change society, but they prepare the people who do.

Educational parks were viewed as a possible solution: they provide a neutral ground where none are outsiders, and they provide large groups in which less of a stigma is attached to the problems of education. They also provide a chance for children to face each other, rather than facts about each other.

Several suggestions for improving education came up: tailor education to the needs of different people; change teachers' attitudes through exposure to the inner city; and lower the student/adult ratio as well as the student/teacher ratio --that means more aides, tutors, counsellors, and so forth.

GROUP 7, Private Schools

Chairman: Mrs. John M. Bozer

Consultant: Rt. Rev. Msgr. William D. Roche
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Rochester

It was agreed that private schools do have a role in solving the problem. Representatives of local private schools said they are working with scholarships and summer programs to reach the underprivileged children in the city, but there are limitations in finances and facilities.

The private school, it was pointed out, exists to provide an unusually high-quality education as its contribution to the community. However, as one man pointed out, "responsibility lies outside our own walls; everyone has an equal stake in America."

Some people wondered if private and parochial schools foster segregation on the basis of class and religion. Another worry expressed was that public aid to private and parochial schools might cut the now-limited amounts available to core-city public schools. Representatives of parochial schools said they would, if given public money, take more students, but the schools would insist on keeping prayers, religious instruction, etc. They pointed out that some parochial schools in Buffalo have as high as 40 percent Negro enrollment, much of that non-Catholic.

Suggestions from the individuals in the group included:

1. Public and private school administrators should work together on educational parks and other possible solutions.
2. Non-public schools should take a more forthright stand in offering quality integrated education.
3. Additional help to non-public schools should not be at the expense of the public schools.

GROUPS
8 and 9, Bussing Plans

Chairmen: Dr. Stanley H. Cramer
State University of New York
at Buffalo

Mr. Daniel Acker
Treasurer, BUILD

Consultants: Mr. Edward Sullivan, Principal
Union Elementary School
Unionville, Connecticut

Mr. William D. Hope
West Irondequoit
Board of Education

Although the subject was discussed heatedly in almost every other group, so few people registered for the sessions on bussing that the two were combined.

The Hartford and Rochester plans for bussing were compared: both are city-suburb plans rather than in-city plans. Rochester involves only one suburb--West Irondequoit--on a small scale; it has roused much opposition, and may be dropped if one more opposition school board member is elected.

In Hartford, five communities surrounding the city take part, and there is strong civic and commercial support for the project. Hartford also transfers one city teacher to the suburbs for every 25 students.

Someone asked if there is a grade level at which bussing is ineffective because of the extreme difference in two groups. No specific point could be established, although there was agreement that younger transfers work better.

Some attention was given to the success Boston has with open enrollment: students can enroll in any suburban school that has an opening, but must provide their own transportation.

Proponents of bussing schemes admitted that there is some tendency to self-segregation among students bussed together, but they argued it was no more than could be exprected from any new group relationship.

It was argued that the government, at some level, should subsidize bussing, and perhaps set up these programs on a standard basis. The answer to that was: "What works best in one community may not work best, or at all, in another. What works best locally probably is best determined locally."

It was argued, without resolution, that teachers as group will not be opposed to bussing. The extent and nature of the argument among the adults present highlighted the conclusion voiced by one man: "The kids couldn't care less; it's the parents who make the differences."

WHAT WORKS, WHERE, AND HOW

The addresses in the afternoon were by persons actively involved in one or another of the kinds of projects designed to solve the problems discussed in the small-group sessions.

Dr. Franklyn Barry, Superintendent of Schools in Syracuse, N.Y., on "Educational Parks"

"Urban areas throughout the country." Dr. Barry said, "face what amounts to educational poverty." Problems of all kinds, he added, are developing much faster than solutions to any of them can be found. The answer may be in educational parks, although these parks obviously will not work equally well in all situations.

Dr. Barry described the "Campus Plan" in Syracuse, a form of the educational park plan. All Syracuse high schools are already desegregated; the Campus Plan will replace all present elementary schools with integrated parks. The city owns several sites near the suburbs; each site has room for 8 school units accomodating about 530 students each in kindergarten through the 6th grade.

Syracuse officials, said Dr. Barry, feel the Campus Plan will improve education for all students. In addition, it has been an effective way to replace obsolete facilities while cutting land acquisition costs. How much can be attempted in an educational park, and how much can be expected of it, depends, said Barry, "on the amount of money the people are willing to put into it."

Mr. William Hope, school board member, West Irondequoit, N.Y., on "Bussing Plans"

Mr. Hope described how his West Irondequoit School Board had, in 1964, met a series of questions with a highly controversial answer. The questions: what goals should we set? what can we ask of educators in preparing our children for the future? how can we effect the changes needed to keep our schools up with a changing world? The answer that year was to invite the city of Rochester to send some core-city children to fill vacancies in the West Irondequoit schools.

There was "favorable response, amounting at times to enthusiastic praise," from school administrators, parent-school groups, the clergy of the district, the teachers association, and the high school student organization. However, Mr. Hope pointed out, the response from the general public was not all favorable: attendance at school board meetings soared; legal action was taken to stop the program; and in three of four recent contests, voters elected to the board persons openly opposed to the program.

The situation now is uncertain, he admitted, because one more opposition vote on the present board will end the program. Nevertheless, Mr. Hope expressed continuing faith in the program. saying "More and more people in West Irondequoit who support the policy have become convinced that a part of America's battle with racism is taking place in their own home town, and that they are in a position to help win it."

Mrs. Dorothy Jones, Director, Office of Church and Race of the Protestant Council of New York City, on "Compensatory Education"

"Compensatory education," Mrs. Jones began, "is not costly, and has not been unsuccessful." The problem, she went on, has been in understanding exactly what compensatory education is, and what it is not. It is not simply a matter of enriching the curriculum, and it does not allow continuation of segregated schools.

"Compensatory education provides all children in schools those things they are not, or cannot be given at home," Mrs. Jones said. In that way, it applies to all children. The student in the suburbs in a "golden ghetto," though he is comfortable, still is isolated. He as well as the city dweller must be compensated for the limitations of his education.

For along time, she said, schools have identified and compensated for physical and mental limitations of their students. It is time now to recognize that social limitations also exist, and that compensation for them must be provided in the schools.

Thus far, Mrs. Jones concluded, the educational establishment has not caught up with changes in our society. As a result, our schools are not yet equipped to give students all they need.

Very Reverend Msgr. William Roche, Superintendent of Schools, Catholic Diocese of Rochester, on "Private Schools"

Monsignor Roche, though his topic was the private school generally, spoke primarily for the parochial schools.

He pointed out that 1 out of every 8 students in the United States is in a parochial school, (for Buffalo, that figure is 1 in 3). The parochial schools, therefore, with so many students to educate, are not unaware of, nor are they unconcerned about, the problems of equal education for all students.

However, Roche said, the parochial schools are singularly hampered by financial limitations: they must provide virtually all their own funds, without tax support.

The parochial schools in the suburbs are, almost without exception, full to overcrowded now, with no room for any more students. Most have waiting lists of their own church members, who have been unable to register their children. In the cities, the parochial schools often do have room for more students. These schools, Roche noted, do take large numbers of additional students, with no regard to race or religion.

Mr. James Bent, past president, Hartford, Conn., Area Chamber of Commerce, on "Interest of the Business Community"

"The activities undertaken in Hartford to combat social problems are prompted by a concern that is felt by every businessman across the country who knows the facts." With those words, Mr. Bent acknowledged the stake business has in providing equality of opportunity, and introduced the plan under way in Hartford to provide it.

Several years ago, he said, Hartford business leaders recognized that municipal progress was tied to solution of core-city problems. And these problems were not only in education; "Why make an effort to get a decent education if you can't hope for a decent job, or live in a decent house in a decent neighborhood?"

And so Hartford put into action "Operation: Go." With support from business, Mr. Bent said, a record 41 million dollar bond issue for school buildings was passed, and a new regional community college was established. In addition, the business community supported a proposal for establishing a middle school system, and a city-suburb bussing plan that went into effect with no serious opposition.

Mr. Bent described how Hartford business concerns have set up education and training programs in the area at their own expense, rescuing from oblivion school drop-outs and other perennially unemployed persons. He also told how the Chamber of Commerce has set up a nonprofit corporation to help develop better housing: the Greater Hartford Housing Development Fund, Inc. The Fund has assets of over a million dollars to help finance quality housing. It also provides consultant services for builders.

The business community stands to gain from all this, Mr. Bent acknowledged, as there is a "very direct link between the interests of education and business. Business is the largest consumer of the product of our schools--educated young people." Not only that, he explained, but something more: "We businessmen too are, by and large, decent human beings."

Those interested in working toward improved opportunity for all in Buffalo have, in the business community, "friends ready to cover the distance with you."

WHAT WAS IT ALL ABOUT?

What good was the conference? Did it open any eyes, change any attitudes, produce any action? No one can be sure. Certainly, by bringing people into contact with others who had different views, it forced some serious thought about things that may have been taken for granted.

Everyone that attended was invited to submit a brief evaluation of the conference on a form mailed out afterward. Reviewing these evaluations provided valuable information: the complimentary things most people said showed that the conference had accomplished part of its goal; suggestions from many people indicated areas for additional work in the field; occasional criticism helped identify teachniques and goals for futher conferences.

Most respondents agreed that more conferences would help, and suggested general topics which might be covered. These additional conferences, many thought, should be smaller, at local levels; they should be held in many places -- suburbs, schools, city neighborhoods, or, as one man suggested, "A conference like this should be an opportunity for whites to really feel the presence of negroes as well as share ideas with them. Why not leave the college atmosphere next time and rent a hall in the inner city (where there isn't much 'equality of educational opportunity')?"

Some argued that the conference could have been better if those attending didn't all share similar views. As if to refute that, an anonymous respondent said, "Leave the suburban schools out of any further discussions. Buffalo should solve its own problems." He apparently had been in the same group with a Buffalo civic leader, who pleaded, "Some suburban folks said in essence, 'We suburbanites have no real responsibility for what happens in the city.' Let's convince them somehow that they do."

From requests for additional information, it appeared that the two morning speeches, by Doctors Cohen and Wolff, stirred up the most interest. As a representative of a local business firm said, "The more the general public can be exposed to these forward-thinking educators, the sooner will come realization of the problems and the needs in education. Business and industry certainly can help, and should be involved with planning."

A number of comments dispelled any notion that everyone agreed with the speakers. Perhaps the most direct one came from a woman representing a city parents' group, who said, "It is obvious that this conference was an attempt to brain-wash the public into accepting the concept of an educational park to achieve racial balance. We are opposed to this type of program."

Small-group discussions were, for many, a revealing insight into the way different people think and feel; this was the one part of the conference that everyone commented on, for good or for bad. Those who complained about the discussions were disturbed, more than anything else, by what they thought was domination of their group by one or a few speakers. The other side of that problem came from those who complained that "Some people didn't try to contribute to the group discussions."

There was nothing approaching a consensus on the "most helpful" and "least helpful" parts of the conference. Every element -- morning speakers, morning groups, afternoon speakers, afternoon groups -- was listed at least once as the "most helpful" and at least once, by someone else, as "least helpful."

If any consistent tone was in evidence in the responses, it may have been expressed by the anonymous respondent who wrote, "How loud must we shout for genuine thinking on the real issues, for solutions, for action?"

The Equal Opportunity Conference
was sponsored by the
Buffalo Board of Education
by the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce
and by Project Innovation

The work presented or reported herein was performed, in part on a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Office of Education should be inferred.