DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 059 324 UD 012 094

AUTHOR Dentler, Robert A.
TITLE Innovations in Public Education in New York City. City Almanac, Volume 6, Number 4, December 1971.
INSTITUTION New School for Social Research, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Dec 71
NOTE 9p.; Bi-monthly Bulletin of the Metropolitan Information Service

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education; *Compensatory Education; Curriculum Development; Decentralization; Educational Finance; *Educational Innovation; Educational Policy; Policy Formation; Program Development; Public Education; *School Community Relationship; Social Change; *Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS Elementary Secondary Education Act Title I; ESEA Title I; *New York

ABSTRACT

Five major themes mark the development of public education in New York City from its early nineteenth century beginning to the mid-twentieth century: (1) the effort to provide free education for all children through the twelfth grade; (2) the development of special schools and programs for gifted youth; (3) the development of programs for children with special difficulties; (4) the elaboration of a highly standardized grade structure, curriculum, and procedures for the mass of children; and, (5) a contrasting theme of experimentation and innovation. A strong impetus to innovation came in the mid-1960's with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which brought 60 to 85 million dollars a year for four years in to the system targeted explicitly for innovative programs in schools in poverty areas. Although the rate of success was not high, Federal aid did trigger a search for alternatives to the traditional school and stimulated the development of bi-lingual education in a number of schools, the introduction of the Open Door approach, and revised methods for teaching reading and mathematics in the elementary schools. Decentralization offers the potential for improvement in schools through the involvement of local residents as teacher aides and the effort to modify curriculum to fit the needs of the particular student body. (Author/JM)

City Almanac

Published bi-monthly by the Center for New York City Affairs of the New School for Social Research • 72 Fifth Avenue, New York City 10011

INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW YORK CITY

Almost all aspects of urban life are matters of controversy today and this is true particularly in New York City where everything is much bigger than anywhere else. And so, like that little girl with the curl, when New York is good it is very, very good, and when it is bad it is horrid. Education, until fairly recent years, a subject of concern mainly to educators, has become a major focus of public discussion, frequently heated, in fact, overheated.

Dr. Robert Dentler, Director of the Center for Urban Education, has been deeply involved for some years in the efforts to improve the educational system in New York. In this article for City Almanac he traces the development of the complex system of elementary and high school education in the city, explains how innovations have been developed and expanded and discusses what, in his view, lies ahead. Not everyone will agree with him but that is normal in an area of controversy.

The trend toward an increasing involvement of various interest groups in educational policy and administration and the resulting increasing politicization of the school system cannot be reversed. What is needed to insure that the education of a generation of school children is not sacrificed is continuous, unbiased evaluation of the various innovations which are being tried so that the ineffective ones can be quickly dropped and the good ones can be extended to more and more children and young people.

HENRY COHEN
Director
Center for N.Y.C. Affairs

BLANCHE BERNSTEIN
Editor, City Almanac

New York City from the point of view of its educational development, as well as its economic, social and cultural development, is one of the great cities of the world. Like other cities from London to Tokyo, its public schools represent every teaching-learning process from the very best to the very worst, although most of its schools have performed *above* the American school average for more than a century.

Public education, which for the purposes of this article is confined to the elementary through the high school level, got underway on a sizeable scale in 1805. Parts of what is New York today had public schools before that date, while other parts had barely begun by 1860. The five-borough, 31 community district basic to New York public elementary, intermediate and high schools of today, took on its current characteristics between 1910 and 1940.

The system is indescribably complex and varied in some respects and highly uniform and standardized in others. Generalizations about any public agency serving over 1.1 million children and youth and employing more than 65,000 adults are bound to be suspect. Since the New York picture is further complicated by the fact that both students and staff are ethnically and economically more heterogeneous than in any other school system anywhere in the world, it is evident that generalizations are extremely difficult. Nevertheless, no effort to discuss the system and make some sense of the discussion can altogether avoid generalization. All one can do is warn the reader that whenever they are made they can be riddled with contradictions.

One way to think of public education in New York City is in terms of the gradual evolution of organizational forms and routines. One function of public schools has long been to introduce the young to the ongoing, surrounding, adult society. The conditions obstructing this function in a city like New York have *always* been formidable: The society of the City itself has changed at a breath-taking pace during every decade. Adult interest groups in control of the schools have often *not* reflected the full range of population interests, and they have lagged, in their own comprehension, behind the rate of social change.

The total *number* of students has remained fairly stable since 1935 — rarely falling below 1.0 million and seldom exceeding 1.2 million. Yet, the ethnic and social class backgrounds of students have differed greatly from decade to decade. Finally, there has never been widespread consensus about *aspects* of the adult society teachers ought to prepare students for. And, there have been taboos against teaching very much about many socially essential aspects: sex, religion, and race, to mention a few.

New York City's lay leaders and educators, facing these obstacles, gradually developed a system that emphasized some features where consensus seemed possible, or stability could be maximized, and only occasionally probed others through experimentation. The features emphasized — embodied slowly into law and even more gradually enforced — were these: Public schooling would be (1) *free* of direct cost to families; (2) *universal* in its availability to all resident children; (3) compulsory; (4) equitable in the spread of resources from one school to another; (5) controlled by lay citizens; and (6) operated by professional educators.

These features were codified statewide, of course, in education laws overseen by the new Board of Regents. In fact, the role of the state

has been increasing in dominance over New York City public education for more than a century. Today, the city's Central Board of Education and the 31 Community Boards are, under the law, *agencies* of the State Education Department. Roughly half of all monies for public schooling are state supplied. By 1980, it is very probable that *all* financing will be state controlled.

Given these features, considerable standardization of the forms and routines of schooling—including the content and styles of classroom teaching—proved almost inevitable. This has taken place throughout the United States, but it took place, under the conditions, faster and more rigorously in New York City than elsewhere.

The Major Themes in Public Education, 1805-1950

Five themes weave through the first 145 years of public education in New York, from the beginning in 1805 to 1950. The first is the effort of city educators to provide free instruction for all resident children from kindergarten through twelfth grade. In 1910, for example, roughly only 20 percent of New York City's students went on to senior high school after completing eighth grade. By 1970, more than 70 percent were continuing through twelfth grade. More than mere compulsory attendance law requirements underlies this change. For example, high schools were progressively diversified by type of offerings and levels of academic difficulty in order to improve their capacity to receive and hold an ever widening range of students. This response usu-

Summary

The New York City public education system at the elementary and high school levels, serving 1.1 million children and employing 65,000 adults is not only large, its student body and staff are ethnically and economically more heterogeneous than in any other system in the world. Further, the ethnic and social class backgrounds of students have differed greatly from decade to decade.

Five major themes mark the development of public education from its early 19th century beginning to the mid-20th century. These were 1) the effort to provide free education for all children through the 12th grade and in this it was substantially successful, 2) the development of special schools and programs for gifted youth, 3) the development of programs for children with special difficulties, 4) the elaboration of a highly standardized grade structure, curriculum, and procedures for the mass of children, and 5) a contrasting theme of experimentation and innovation.

The rigidities of the system and the fiscal constraints on it, in combination with the large scale in-migration of the 50's after 25 years of relative stabilit, resulted in increasing failure of the system to meet the needs of its student body. This failure occurred despite the large scale investments in new plants and in higher teacher salaries and intensified efforts to recruit more effective teachers. With public expectations soaring far beyond the system's response, parents and taxpayers began to organize and demonstrate while educators strained to innovate.

By 1960, creative innovations were springing up throughout the city school system, particularly in low income neighborhoods. The best of them were the products of inventive, determined principals. Most school programs in most neighborhoods, however, had changed very little during the preceding decade.

A new impetus to innovation came in the mid 1960's with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary School Act which brought $60-$85 million a year for four years into the system targeted explicitly for innovative programs in elementary and high schools in poverty neighborhoods. The innovations were mainly shaped, however, by school administrators and policy makers with little input from teachers or parents. Analysis of evaluations of the various Title I innovative programs indicates that not more than 10-15 percent of them resulted in observable improvements in the academic achievement of low income children and youth. The best of the innovative programs concentrated resources on one or two major needs of disadvantaged students and/or involved students and parents in the development of the program.

While the rate of success was not high, federal aid did trigger a search for alternatives to the traditional school and stimulated the development of bi-lingual education in a number of schools, the introduction of the Open Door approach, and revised methods for teaching reading and math in the elementary schools. A number of useful changes were also introduced into the intermediate schools such as more flexible scheduling of educational programs, procedures for identifying talents and for grouping students to individualize instruction, and the school within the school approach. Relatively little was done, however, in the high schools although a few have experimented with alternatives to the traditional curriculum. Recently, Chancellor Scribner initiated the Satellite Academies which offer a new approach to employer-based education; three opened in 1971 to serve about 400 youth from 16 to 18 years of age.

The school desegregation struggle, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy, the 1968 teacher strike and other events all led to the still unresolved conflict over decentralization. Though decentralization is not new in New York — centralization only took place 60 years ago — and its final shape is not yet clear, it offers the potential for improvement in the schools through the involvement of local residents as teacher aides and the effort to modify curriculum to fit the needs of the particular student body. Hopefully, the closer involvement of the community in the school's operation will help reduce truancy and thus increase the amount of state money for local schools. It is possible, however, that under a decentralized system truancy may get worse before it gets better.

For the future, solutions to the problems of education in New York will have to be worked out through the cooperative efforts of all three levels of government, the parents, the taxpayers, and the students. Programs will differ from school to school and within schools. Some of the programmatic needs of the decade ahead can be identified — multilingual instruction, study materials pertinent to the multiethnic population, increased lay participation in school affairs and teaching, and improved connections between the worlds of school and work.

ally fell far short of demand. Moreover, the earliest preferential treatment of college-bound academic preparatory students persists to this day. But the scope of overall change toward inclusiveness is a *relative* triumph of the system.

A second theme is the development of special schools and programs for *gifted* youths. This is expressed best in the establishment between 1920 and 1940 of the elite high schools (e.g., the Bronx High School of Science) where admission has been based, for the most part, on demonstrated scholastic ability and where teaching standards have been kept at the highest levels. Even at the elementary school level, special classes for intellectually gifted children have been stressed in differing ways for many years.

A third theme has been the development of special programs for children with special difficulties. New York City established a school for "pauper children" in 1805. By 1898, the city operated 58 special schools for dependent, destitute, neglected and physically handicapped children. In 1964, the city operated over 40 '600 schools,' intended to serve the educational needs of students defined as emotionally and socially maladjusted.[1]

A fourth major theme has been the elaboration of a very highly *standardized* grade structure, curriculum, and set of operating procedures intended to apply to the mass of 'unexceptional' children from age 5 to age 15. This standardized service system became so established by 1940 that administrators, teachers, and students could and did move about across the great grid of city classrooms like thousands of interchangeable actors sharing in a travelling company that offers a single play.[2]

New York City was far from alone in perfecting the centralized formulation and administration of the elements that made standardization possible. These elements included, first, the lock-step curriculum, which refers to a prescribed program of skill and subject matter instruction for each grade level from kindergarten through eighth grade, and for each of 40 weeks a school year within a grade. The term lock-step means that, in principle and by supervisory regulation, teaching proceeded by centralized plan — irrespective of the individual's variable rate of mastery, learning style, or cognitive and affective interests. It means, too, that changes in what is taught and how were in principle directed from central headquarters, whose educators may or may not be abreast of the changes which were taking place in the various communities in the city. This feature took 30 years to build in. During the 1960's, it disintegrated substantially, although many city schools follow remnants of the scheme today. The second element of standardization was the all-purpose common branches elementary classroom teacher — which emerged nationwide to a point where, in 1966, James Coleman and associates concluded from their study of some 4,000 schools throughout the country that there were greater differences among individuals within any one school than there were between schools and school districts from coast to coast.[3] New York City educators were among the first to perfect the elements of standardization, however. And, they did it more rigorously than their counterparts elsewhere.

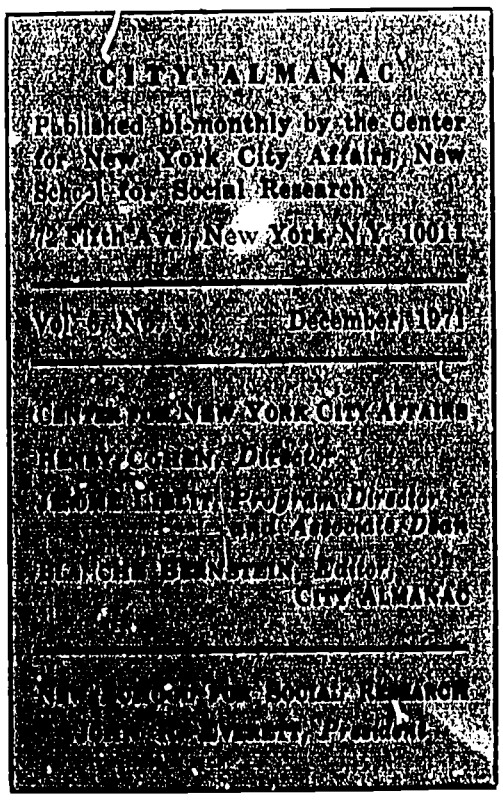
The standardization of a free, increasingly more universal public system of basic formal instruction stimulated the public belief that the schools were the city's chief mechanism for cultural assimilation. Standard written and spoken English; standard dress and manners; standard lesson plans; and standard rituals of upward movement through grades and graduation, gave apparent weight to the belief.

While many historians have documented this function, some have recently re-examined the evidence. A few have concluded that the system *never* served as an assimilator of waves of European immigrant children or of racial and ethnic minorities.[4] Rather, it sifted out those neither disposed nor equipped to merge their identities and it facilitated and advanced those in each generation who were personally so motivated and prepared. Of course, different ethnic groups yielded different proportions of assimilation or school achievement oriented youths. German and, later, Russian Jewish immigrants, for example, proved more receptive in greater relative numbers than did Polish and Italian immigrants.

The fifth theme contrasts with the system's emphasis upon standardization. A great world city abounds in innovations and public educators in New York City have always partaken of the urban heritage of experimentation and innovation. Although some school superintendents fostered this theme, they were exceptions, for the system rarely mandated or rewarded creative departure from its norms. Indeed, in the struggle for stability through regularity, it usually penalized displays of inventiveness. But they have always cropped out, and in such an abundance that many say that other school systems in America have tended to adopt hundreds of practices that were first tried in New York City—including many that were later prohibited or abandoned by the city! The progressive era of 1920-1940, for instance, with its emphasis on greater permissiveness, life adjustment, and social growth, began in the private schools in New York City; then diffused to some of the public schools; and was later to become common place in California.

Great innovations of the New York City public schools over the first 150 years thus included the pioneering development of elite, specialized high schools; special education for handicapped and disturbed students; at least an echo of the progressivism and experimentation growing out of private schools, laboratory schools, and great individual pioneers based in New York; curriculum materials production; and the concept of the junior high school. Each innovation had fundamental drawbacks, but each contributed to the definition of the best that seemed possible in its time.

Over the same period, the worst in the system also reached new heights. This included the authoritarianism of the lock-step curriculum; an aggres-


CITY ALMANAC

Published bi-monthly by the Center for New York City Affairs, New School for Social Research

72 Fifth Ave, New York, N.Y. 10011

Vol. 5, No. 2 — December, 1971

CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS

HENRY CHEN, Director

Program Director

Associate Director

BRANCH BERNSTEIN, Editor

CITY ALMANAC

Social Research

President

sive philosophy of assimilationism which conflicted with the multicultural pluralism so vital to the city; and the creation of inbred insularity of staff fostered through civil service procedures and through recruitment and promotion too exclusively from within the city.

Shimmering over all this was fiscal stringency. From 1900 to 1950, the annual reports of New York City superintendents read like litanies — of unmet needs for staffs, salaries, buildings, books, and supplies. The story of innovations in the city's schools, like the story of mistakes and failures, must be seen in a context of the fiscal constraints in the public municipal economy. Public schooling in New York was never poorly financed if compared with an Arkansas, or even New Hampshire. Relative to urban needs, however, the system in New York City did not begin to get fiscal relief until about 1955.

Necessity Mothers Innovation: 1950-1965

The inadequacies of public educational services in New York City *and* the features that had been the greatness of the system for 150 years began to fail in glaring combination in the early 1950's. These were the years of the overcrowded, roaring, grinding blackboard jungles. Virtually no new schools had been built during the Great Depression. In 1950, a few school plants in use dated back to 1885 and hundreds had been built before World War I. On the other hand, many sturdy buildings were located in neighborhoods that no longer had any significant number of school age youngsters. These went under-utilized while spreading slums hosting tens of thousands of newcoming black and Puerto Rican families with children crowded into dilapidated, rat-infested older school plants.

School staffs and schoolchildren were victimized by rising waves of vandalism, truancy, theft and assaults. The authority relations between adults and youth were eroding everywhere in urban societies, and New York City set the pace. The Sputnik era revealed thousands of teachers who were unprepared to teach the sciences or the new mathematics. The civil rights movement, spurred by the Brown Decision, indicted the system as racially and economically segregated. Teachers were overworked, underpaid, poorly qualified to relate to the ethnic newcomers, and in short supply.

The necessity for bilingual teaching competence in Spanish and English was not acknowledged until 1948, when *eight* Substitute Auxiliary Teachers were hired and assigned to meet this need. By 1957, the number of such teachers had expanded to 76 — this in a school system which even at that time included more than 100,000 Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican pupils![5]

Interestingly, New York City's public educators have a long history of making some small, ever changing accommodation to the *multi-lingual* needs of their diverse student populations. Whole courses and programs of varying degrees of mixtures of at least one language plus English have been introduced during every decade since 1910. Bilingual education in Swedish, German, Hebrew, Italian, and Polish, had grown up and drifted out with the rise and subsequent *partial* lingual assimilation of each nationality group. The big decline in European immigration began with the Immigration Act of 1924, continued during the Great Depression and through World War II. During this 20 year period, equivalent to several generations of students in the elementary and high schools, the need for bilingual instruction vanished. Ironically, the historical pattern was rather widely forgotten by the time of the Puerto Rican influx.

State and city official response to the school crisis of the 1950's was, in retrospect, substantial. Hundreds of new schools were capitalized and consructed. Many of them in neighborhoods of greatest immediate need. In spite of this, poverty and ethnic minority areas had more dilapidated, older, and overcrowded school buildings on the average than other areas as late as 1963. As of 1971, the South Bronx had no high school and central Harlem had no high school. Both levels of government increased their investments in public education, and teacher salaries began to rise by the end of the decade, while efforts to recruit more effective teachers were intensified. The response proved to be far short of public demand, however. Public expectations had begun to soar. Educational services left the domain of neglected affairs and staggered into the battle arena of political struggles.

In this climate, parents and taxpayers learned to organize and demonstrate while educators strained to innovate. After years of public pressure, for example, the city — with state aid — constructed P. S. 108 in East Harlem in 1951. Its Principal, Jack August, devised innovative programs to welcome Puerto Rican children, to orient them to New York, and to begin kindergarten instruction in the Spanish mother tongue. Programmatic innovations and public confidence grew in reciprocal tandem.

By 1956, P. S. 108 was swamped with difficulties: Over-crowded beyond bearing, it had to switch to a triple shift system, with first to third graders getting not more than four hours of instruction a day. New and challenging demographic and cultural necessities had fostered a creative educational response all right, but by 1962, P.S. 108 had lost its productive prospect and had reverted to a valiant but harrassed slum school.

By 1960, creative innovations were springing up throughout the city public school system, particularly in low income neighborhoods. The best of these were the unmistakable products of inventive, determined principals.

Consider P.S. 175 in Central Harlem as typical, for instance. Under its Principal, Stanley Lisser, a veteran, home-grown product of the New York system, P.S. 175 instituted an innovative early childhood education program which stressed reading. Research and development assistance was attracted: Drs. Martin and Cynthia Deutsch brought the resources of their Institute for Child Development to bear, as did faculty members from Bank Street School of Education, the City College of New York, Queens College, and Teachers College. Programmed and structured materials were introduced. Black history, local history, and African studies were injected, as were the cultural devices of the Higher Horizons program.[6]

Teacher expectations about the educability of children were raised. Tendencies to blame the home environment were challenged. Good parent-school contacts were established. Reading and math achievement scores began to rise to approach the conventional levels of middle class neighborhoods. A few white parents, even two families from the silk-stocking district of P.S. 6 in Manhattan, engaged in voluntary *reverse* bussing out of enthusiasm for what was emerging as a learning environment within P.S. 175.

Few of the innovations at P.S. 175 have lasted. Political conflicts over who should be principal began in 1967. After that, P.S. 175 had to take

its full share in the much broader, profounder experiment in decentralization conducted in its area from 1967 through 1969. During the citywide struggles in those years, over half the P.S. 175 staff turned over. These are changes, not losses or failures, however, for P.S. 175 remains a viable, hope-giving school.

Another example of the creative responses of some principals during the period 1950-65 is P.S. 129, of the John Finley School, in Harlem.[7] P.S. 129 is a Special Service school, meaning it suffers from heavy pupil and teacher turnover, low academic achievement, records large numbers of free lunches for low-income pupils, and therefore qualifies for "special" status and resources from the Board of Education. It serves 1,100 children: 89 percent black, 10 percent Puerto Rican, and 1 percent other.

Mrs. Martha Froelich, who became principal of P.S. 129 in 1961, and her staff designed and used inventive approaches to beginning reading. Ability grouping was required by the system (although Mrs. Froelich prefers other approaches), but it was used flexibly and creatively. Mrs. Froelich not only administrates; she teaches: children, teachers, and parents. She invests herself deeply in day to day operations. The techniques have had results: P.S. 129 students from 1963 to 1970 began to show reading and math scores on a par with students in most middle class neighborhoods in the city!

From 1955 to 1965, handfuls of determined and inventive educators, developed new ways to meet challenges in their neighborhood schools. An informed guess would be that one in ten schools made unique responses in this period. Most school programs in most neighborhoods, however, changed very little over this decade. Although public expenditures for lower education *tripled* in these years; although new facilities sprung up in abundance; and although innovations were beginning to appear, educational traditionalism prevailed in the main.

In this period, New York City schools moved farther in efforts at desegregation and the equalization of resources and opportunities than any other city among the nation's 20 largest central cities.[8] Yet, these efforts were slight in scale compared with needs, and even these were resisted by thousands of schoolmen and schoolwomen, as well as by working and middle class whites. *The Allen Report*, presented by State Education Commissioner James Allen to the New York City Board of Education early in 1964, showed that the school system's responses to issues of racial justice *and* of quality were gravely short of what would be required for the years from 1965 to 1980.[9] Public education was in a growing crisis.

Federal Aid and Innovation: 1966-1969

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 set in motion new resources for New York City schools beginning in 1966. For each of four years, $60 to $85 million federal dollars streamed into the system, targeted explicitly at supporting innovations in poverty neighborhood schools and the secondary schools they fed. Hundreds of supposedly new approaches to excellence and instructional assistance ensued, fueled by this opportunity. In the first years of Title I programming, few teachers and virtually no parents or students had a hand in shaping these approaches. The ideas were derived from school administrators and policy makers. There were two faults to this: The designers were the very officers of the system which was in crisis, many of them people who had discouraged innovations even among their professional peers, and most of them long out of contact with education in poverty neighborhoods. Secondly, their unilateral programs did little to rebuild public confidence, where collaboration might have helped greatly.

The Center for Urban Education, a research and development laboratory in education, joined with hundreds of university experts and other specialists in efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of these Title I programs during their first three and a half years. Judging from the summary analyses of these evaluations, it appears that perhaps from 10 to 15 percent of the projects resulted in observable improvements in the academic achievement of low-income children and youth.[10] The best programs had one or both of these elements: they were carefully planned to concentrate new resources at one or two major needs of disadvantaged students, and/or they entailed student and parental involvement. The record as a whole reads like a relatively grim story of hastily conceived, expensively mounted experiments in educational failure.

One of the root causes may be what urbanist Jane Jacobs has called 'cataclysmic monies.' That is, too much money is dumped into a municipal service disaster zone after long years of deprivation and neglect, stimulating further confusion and culminating in new failures which undermine confidence in the programmatic remedy itself. Only a few big city school systems (notably in California and Michigan) seem to have prevented this outcome. They seem to have concentrated the federal funds upon a few programs with well specified procedures.

Pre-School and Elementary School Innovations

Nonetheless, federal aid triggered a search for alternatives to standardized, traditional schools in New York City. For example, federal aid for Headstart classes provided a stimulus for upgrading the quality of early childhood education. Not only were excellent pre-kindergarten services brought into being for the children of the poorest families, but new programming was stimulated in day care centers and in middle class nursery schools as well. Gradually, over the years from 1965 to 1971, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade materials, services, and teaching have been strengthened substantially through new investments in early childhood education.

Federal monies for bilingual education have not begun to close the gap between city needs and technical capabilities, but at least three neighborhood schools now offer *comprehensive* instruction in different sequences of both English and Spanish. Roughly 30 other elementary schools serving predominantly Spanish-origin students have partial programs, auxiliary teachers, and teacher aides with bilingual features and skills.

Federal aid and, later, extra state monies, enabled the introduction of the Open Door approach into P.S. 123 and, later, P.S. 84 in Harlem under the leadership of Lillian Weber.[11] The Open Door approach involves an adaptation of English Infant School innovations to the conditions characteristic of urban elementary schools in America. Key elements of the approach include the release of students and teachers from the walled-in confines of the isolated classroom. School corridors are fully utilized as children move freely and vocally to and from individual and group learning projects. The aim is to set up a flexible and intimate learning environment, to provide greater continuity between

5

grade levels, and to enrich the curriculum so that children have a chance to relate to more things and more people.

No formal appraisal of the achievement outcomes has yet been made, but the climate within these schools is different from the traditional. The impressions of teachers, parents and students are so favorable that the approach is beginning to spread: Four other city elementary schools began to adopt the Open Door approach in 1970. Its diffusion has been urged by New York State Education Commissioner Ewald Nyquist, among hundreds of other prominent educators.

Federal funding made possible other professional developments in these years. The Center for Urban Education, for example, used federal funds to join with Schools for the Future, Incorporated, and P.S. 133 in Harlem in 1968, to revise teaching approaches to beginning reading and math.[12] Dr. Caleb Gattegno, an educational psychologist with a record of long experience in working with New York City teachers, trained the faculty (at their invitation and that of the Principal, Mrs. Dellora Hercules) to take a new approach to instruction.

The Gattegno method subordinates the role of the teacher to that of the learner and the learner is held responsible for his own progress. In this reading approach, phonics and the teaching of whole sentences are virtually *abandoned* initially, as is any emphasis of the teacher upon the child's home dialect or upon 'helping' the child by giving him answers and correcting his errors. Instead, Mr. Gattegno's teachers organize English into 48 sounds, with a color code to signal each sound. (Colors are learned faster than complex sounds; moreover, a color-phonetic relation is built up this way. Once the sounds are mastered, color is discarded.) For example, the child learns to use seven different colors to 'trigger' his use of the seven different sounds for the vowel *e*. Through color-coded visual dictation, the child masters a pre-selected, simplified reading vocabulary of 600 words in color. Later, the method branches out to a comprehensive reading, writing and spelling program. This method was used for more than an hour each day in first grade.

Similarly, Gattegno uses colored rods, named after their inventor, Georges Cuisenaire, to teach arithmetic by color-coded activities. Initially, in free play, the student discovers that rods of the same color are equal in length, and that to produce various *equal* lengths, particular rods must be placed end to end. Number notations and transactional notations are introduced long after equivalency relationships and differences have been experienced through work with the rods. As they do this, they are introduced to mental computation. Then, children begin to use letters instead of colors to refer to the rods ("y" for yellow, etc.) Once they have learned +, −, and =, they begin writing this way: y + w = p. This math, too, was taught for about one hour *every* day.

Gattegno's method represents one among many available innovative methods in early teaching of the three R's. What was significant was that teachers at P.S. 133 made it work effectively for *their* students. No one method fits all children, of course.

Evaluation revealed the approach—which emphasizes individual student responsibility for mastering the rudiments of reading, writing, and ciphering — to be cost-effective. Achievement scores rose significantly over a three year period. Elements of the Gattegno method are now being adopted in other schools in the city system.

Secondary Level Innovative Programs

The Allen Report found the city's junior high schools to be the weakest link in the chain of the school system. Their faculties contained a restive blend of teachers: Some were child-centered, general purpose, elementary style teachers; others were departmentalized, academic discipline-centered teachers from the high school tradition. Facilities were very overcrowded; remedial and guidance services were exceptionally weak; and poorly prepared *ninth* graders were proving disruptive and increasingly alienated. Junior high schools were tailored more to prepare average to high performing youths for academic and technical high schools and less to supply a relevant general education for below-average students. *The Allen Report* called for the restoration of the four year comprehensive high school, the progressive elimination of junior highs, and the introduction of intermediate or middle schools serving sixth through eighth grade pupils.

The changeover to intermediate schools has been underway since 1965.[13] Initially, the policy change injected more chaos into both junior highs and senior highs, as already crowded high schools made room for thousands of ninth graders and as educators struggled to define the new curriculum for the schools in the middle.

Once again, positive innovations came mainly from school administrators. Irving Camel, Principal of Intermediate School 131 in the Bronx, is a good example. In the school, he and his staff prefer to call by its proper name, Albert Einstein Intermediate School, a cluster of changes were introduced from 1966 through 1968. For instance, homeroom classes were made more heterogeneous rather than being grouped by ability. Complex, flexible scheduling was introduced to enable each child to move from his homeroom base toward a set of offerings fitted to his educational needs. Within classes, procedures were installed for identifying talents and for grouping students in order to individualize instruction. More recently, I.S. 131 has begun to develop a 'school within a school' approach which enables students to identify with a smaller peer group and a more personally involved subgroup of the teaching staff. Similar efforts to create greater diversity and flexibility have grown up in many of the new intermediate schools within the city.

The city's public high schools preserved their separateness from the lower levels of the system throughout this period. The high schools have long been controlled by their principals and department chairmen. Each works to maintain a distinctive mission of its own. Some are general purpose high schools serving limited subcommunities. Others draw their students from whole boroughs. Still others, particularly the vocational, technical, and elite schools, serve students from everywhere in the five boroughs.

A few high schools are distinguished for their disposition to experiment. One of these is John Dewey High School for example, where strong efforts have been underway to depart from the lock-step curriculum through flexible scheduling; the designing of electives responsive to student and faculty interests and to the hunger for contemporary relevance; shorter class time periods; and greater diversity of programs and services.

An older, neighborhood based high school, Benjamin Franklin High in East Harlem, has experimented with a variety of alternative approaches

since 1967. Most recently, Benjamin Franklin has operated a 'mini-school' for 200 students which has a permanently attached sub-faculty of its own and a promising approach to breaking down the *departmentalization* of offerings.

New York City has yet to establish a single high school that stands as a radical departure from tradition, as have such cities as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Portland, Oregon. The best known of these, Philadelphia's Parkway Program, which began in 1969 is administered by John Bremer, former Superintendent of the Experimental Two Bridges District on New York City's Lower East Side.[14] Parkway, a school without walls, serves about 400 students admitted by lottery among applicants. Its program is non-graded. There are courses, but there are also 'tutorials,' a social unit composed of 16 students, one certified teacher, and a teacher intern. The tutorials are basic skills-learning and human associational units. Outside and around them are many courses taught by housewives, business executives, librarians, adult volunteers, and students themselves. Courses are supplemented by independent individual study, and both tasks take students out into settings throughout Philadelphia.

There is in New York City, however, a great diversity of approaches from school to school. In an effort to offer another alternative, Chancellor Harvey Scribner initiated the Satellite Academies, three of which opened in 1971 to serve roughly 400 youths from 16 to 18 years of age. The Satellite Academies offer a new approach to employer-based education.[15] Firms ranging from the Chase Manhattan Bank to Lincoln Hospital hire students and pay them working wages while the students alternate work apprenticeships with continuing study toward a high school diploma. This is an outgrowth of cooperative education and its work-study programs, parts of secondary offerings in New York City for many years. The innovative objective of the Satellite Academies is to base academic work closer to the work site and to unify work experience with student interests and growth.

The Role of Universities in Public Education Innovation

New York City is dense with higher educational institutions. About 180 post-secondary schools are located in the Greater New York metropolitan region, most of them in the central city. Perhaps two of every three teachers in the city's public schools are graduates of city colleges and universities. More than half of these are products of one or another college within the City University of New York. New York University's School of Education, in addition, has long served as the major supplier of graduate degrees for supervisory personnel and upwardly mobile teachers.

From 1945 until the late 1950's, institutions of higher learning remained relatively *dissociated* from lower education in New York City. Their contributions to formal teacher preparation, credentialing and examining were great, but apart from research projects and faculty consultation, college staffs met public school teachers mainly on college territory and on college terms. Only education department teacher *trainers* went into the breach between higher and lower schools. And, lacking prestige within the universities, they went with limited resources.

Under the stimuli of the civil rights movement, new state and federal investments in urban education, and a changing conception within college departments concerning obligations to serve the neighboring community, the patterns of dissociation began to change. Between 1958 and 1965, at least 10 of the city's major colleges and universities mounted programs of direct pertinence to lower educational innovation and reform. Bank Street, under the presidency of John Niemeyer, prepared texts and teaching materials that were integrated racially and urban-oriented. Bank Street opened a resources center in Harlem and undertook to operate a model neighborhood pre-school program in midtown Manhattan in close cooperation with parents. Under the presidency of John Fischer, Teachers College of Columbia launched research, planning, development, and training programs in what became a sustained effort to reconnect the college with the city's schools.

Initially, relations were difficult to re-establish. A survey of Harlem adults and adolescents conducted in 1966 disclosed that perhaps eight in ten ghetto residents believed that the City College of New York, located in their midst, was an elite, alien institution.[16] Not until 1969 were City College faculty members able to surmount longstanding walls of suspicion built up as a result of a decade and a half of university withdrawal. Few school principals welcomed university personnel into their schools before 1965, and teachers often believed professors were present to monitor or rate their performance as examiners.

Few college professors, moreover, knew how to proceed. Large projects were designed, as with Project Beacon at Yeshiva University (an innovative program of compensatory education designed for New York City school children in poverty areas), and then went unsupported financially. New York University, with money from the Ford Foundation, established the Clinic for Learning Project in Junior High School 57K in Brooklyn in 1966. University faculty were not well prepared for the scale of challenges they met. They also took on more than their university students could handle. The project suffered an unhappy and notorious life for two years and was abandoned as a failure shortly thereafter.[17]

This experience and similar ones mounted by other colleges led college faculties to ask just what *expertise* they had that was of real pertinence to big city lower education. It also led them to ask harder questions about the actual proportion of professors in their departments who were genuinely disposed to contribute talents if they possessed them. In the late 1960's, as a result, universities and colleges in New York City began to recruit experienced black and Puerto Rican faculty members and graduate students and to establish more clinical and adjunct professorships for accomplished lower school practitioners.

Decentralization and Innovation

Educational changes stemming from school-establishment authorities on the one hand and university-oriented researchers and developers on the other have long been part of New York City public education. Both groups achieved a new intensity of effort between 1955 and 1968, but the results were uneven in quality and miniscule in scale. In the aftermath of the school desegregation struggle, polarized interest groups began to take education issues into their own hands. Public education became irrevocably politicized. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy, the protracted teacher's strike of 1968, and the involvement of the State Board of Regents, the State Education Department, and the State Legislature, all led to the still unresolved conflict over *decentralization*.[18]

Decentralization into 31 community

school districts, while not an educational innovation, is a major change in governance. The New York City school system took a century to consolidate and centralize in the first place. It was only extended to all five boroughs roughly 60 years ago, and even then various aspects of community control were substantial.

But, decentralization of governance after 50 years of ever-increasing centralization of control over the appointment of staff and instructional programming represents a *potentially* profound change. We say potentially because the change is too recent to assess. Moreover, decentralization is not only less than three years old, its extent has yet to be worked out fully. There remains a Central Board of Education which still controls the high schools, the overall budget, and has the power to protect the tenure of teachers. There is still a centralized Board of Examiners, with full power to test and to license staff for all levels in the city system. Future developments await the actions of the state legislature.

Even the current degree of decentralization offers new possibilities for restoring public confidence in the efficacy of schooling. For example, thousands of local neighborhood residents are now employed as teacher aides and other kinds of school paraprofessionals as a result of community school board policies. Through these aides, the needs and interests of local parents and children are being more fully and precisely communicated to teachers and principals. For another example, many teachers are modifying *what* they teach in efforts to fit it to the distinctive needs and styles of their students. In brief, decentralization offers opportunities for reducing the cultural distance between school staff, students and parents.

Reducing that distance could have practical, positive effects. For example, New York State aid to public schools is allocated by a formula which includes average daily student attendance as one factor. Truancy currently works against financial aid, just as it also works against the quality of learning. Truancy rates have increased very substantially over the last decade in New York City high schools, and this trend has spread to many elementary schools as well. Attendance teachers paid to prevent truancy have been able to do little to change this trend. Among the forces underlying this inability has been progressive disconnection between teachers, attendance teachers and parents. If new and mutually reinforcing connections can be achieved through decentralization, then truancy rates — particularly at the elementary level — will show a decline. Under the previous centralized system, attendance teachers — and earlier, truant officers — followed procedures set by the Bureau of Attendance at the Board of Education headquarters. Today, parts of its old functions are being carried by paraprofessionals accountable to principals, community superintendents and community boards. One must admit the possibility, however, that under the decentralized system, attendance rates may become worse before they become better.

These opportunities can, of course, and will be well or badly used educationally. Some neighborhoods will develop their school resources very well. Some will generate conflicts and strike new lows in the quality of teaching and learning. Still others will reach for consensus around educational mediocrity. Many other districts have felt well served by the city program as it stands. Their leaders will not be concerned with innovation *or* reaction. The overall effect will probably be an enlargement of the mosaic of educational alternatives, in a city and an era in need of enlarged multicultural and multi-media alternatives to uniformity.

Overall, raging community and union struggles over the politics of city education nearly demolished the school system in 1967 and 1968. These have damped down. Below the high school level (still centrally administered in principle and principal-controlled in fact), school staffs in perhaps ten of the districts have moved *toward* the new challenge.

New administrators with new ideas, many of them black and Puerto Rican, have entered the system. New school-to-parent programs of cooperation and mutual education have sprung up. Ethnic studies, local history, drug education, environmental projects are springing up as bridges between the schools and the concerns of families. The thousands of teacher aides drawn from local neighborhoods who have been hired are now welcomed by teachers who resisted paraprofessionalism as late as 1968.

Decentralization and community control together are no panacea for the ills of urban education. They have *no direct* bearing on what is taught or learned. But they do modify the surrounding political conditions, thereby releasing new possibilities for improving education. They offer a chance to free up an otherwise rigid system.

What Lies Ahead

New York City's public schools can no longer rest their case for viability upon the presence of exceptionally gifted, pioneering educators bobbing along bravely in a sea of standardized routines maintained by unexceptional colleagues. No service bureaucracy employing roughly 50,000 professionals and more than 15,000 support personnel — decentralized or centralized — can make the transition from a stable, highly structured view of the cultural heritage to a volatile, highly varied view, without staggering along the way.

Inventive, determined school principals and teachers have always come forward with programs suited to their times and students. This will continue. But the imperative for the 1970's is for policies and practices that work for the masses of educators and students alike. These have *not* yet emerged from the experiences of the 1960's.

What is more, new policies and practices cannot issue from the preferences of administrators and teachers. With the breakdown of old authority structures, and with the politicization of public education, solutions will have to be worked through at every step with agencies at three levels of government; with parents and taxpayers; and with students. Multilateral approaches will offer no prospect for the economies of uniformity or routinization. Programs will differ from neighborhood to neighborhood, from school to school, and within schools. As a profession, educators have never been known for their tolerance of ambiguity, yet that will become the hallmark of the 1970's if teaching is to reflect the individualization, flexibility and diversity its many publics will demand from it.

Urban public schools have always operated within environments marked by power politics, and education has never been taken out of politics. Most of the barriers separating the two that were built up over the past half century were broken during the 1960's. Today, nearly every aspect of schooling has become permeated with the politics of reaction versus reform, state and local parties, and special

8

interest groups. In New York City, decentralization did not introduce politics; it represents an accommodation to it. The benefits that *can* result from widened participation and the diversification of educational programs have been identified and noted above. It must also be acknowledged, however, that there are some potentially grim costs to the total intrusion of politics into urban public education. It is possible that the long term welfare of urban children and youth — always a fragile if crucial value — could be sacrificed. The futures of children will depend as never before upon the quality of the urban power environment.

Some of the programmatic needs of the decade can be identified: A shrinking world and an expanding subcultural pluralism in urban America together require multilingual instruction; materials pertinent to the multi-ethnic, urban student population; reduced distance between school staffs and the lay community to facilitate increased variety of adult participation in school affairs and in teaching; and improved connections between the worlds of school and work. The framework of services must continue to expand, too, until it reaches from educationally effective day care services through at least the first two years of college.

A tremendous intensification of educational research and development occurred in the years from 1958 through today. Although the total — about one fifth of one percent of total expenditures in America go into educational R & D each year, compared with about eight percent for military outlays — is small, it has grown five times since 1960.[19] Policy makers and educators face a new, ever more relevant abundance of materials, techniques and approaches. Many tested alternatives to conventional practices are being adopted at a growing rate, especially in regions beyond the Appalachians.

Technical innovations, while needed, however, are a very incomplete answer to urban educational needs. As the Riles Committee Report of the Federal Urban Education Task Force makes plain,[20] new forms of cooperative involvement are the first essential. These are needed between city, state, and federal agencies above all, but they are also desperately needed locally. The task of educating people is one that requires the flexible inputs of all groups and institutions. The isolated school professional cannot carry the burden. In the words of Nancy Love, a journalist writing about the Philadelphia Parkway Program, "The days of the school system as a triangle, with the superintendent at the apex, have gone. The new geometrical figure is a circle with the work task — learning — at the center and with the total community on the circumference."[21]

Educators, policy makers, and citizens do not now know how to rebuild an entire system. They can only introduce these features as occasional demonstrations or exemplary projects. Faced with a recession and corresponding cuts in federal and state funding in 1971, Chancellor Scribner put his announced hopes *not* upon the system but upon the emergence of more autonomous, locally tailored programs. This is understandable for an interlude which is short on boldness of vision. What is more, it tells the truth about the wrongness of large scale, over-centralized systems as machines for the future.

Nevertheless, we are not without prospect. Evaluations of programs during the 1960's taught us much about which innovations are worth preserving and about how to achieve ever-more productive cooperative participation of all partners in learning. If evaluation research can be kept *non-profit* and independent during the 1970's, the decade of decentralization can be a decade of movement toward educational excellence in New York City. Or, rather, evaluation can serve as a good tool in the hands of those with a *will* to build toward excellence.

Finally, public education in New York City needs release from the distorted, stigmatizing imagery attached to it by white suburbanites. In field visits and studies of even the most celebrated and affluent of suburban schools, researchers have found no programs superior to the best that is offered in New York City, and many programs that are inferior. The problems in the city's schools reflect problems of scale and unequal fiscal resources. They can be ameliorated if decentralization is effective and resources enlarged.

By
ROBERT A. DENTLER
Director, Center for Urban Education

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Pearl H. Berkowitz, et al, editors, *Public Education for Disturbed Children in New York City*. Springfield, Ill.: C. C. Thomas, 1967, pp. 5-19.

[2] John Theobald, "Education," in Lyle Fitch, et al, editors, *Agenda for a City*. New York: Sage Publications, 1971, pp. 165-205.

[3] James S. Coleman, et al, *Equality of Educational Opportunity in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967.

[4] Colin Greer, "An Historical Note: Problems of the Negro Child in the North, 1900-1913," *The Urban Review*, Vol. 1, July 1966, pp. 20-23. Also, "Immigrants, Negroes, and the Public Schools," *The Urban Review*, Vol. 3, January 1969, pp. 9-12. Also, "The View from Coney Island: An Historic Perspective of Educational Deprivation," *The Center Forum*, Vol. 2, December 26, 1967, pp. 4-5.

[5] Dan Wakefield, *Island in the City*. New York: Corinth, 1957, pp. 172-174.

[6] Bernard Mackler, *Little Black Schoolhouse*. New York: Center for Urban Education, mimeographed, 1969.

[7] Program Reference Service, *The Principal As Educator: The Finley School*. New York: Center for Urban Education, 1970.

[8] Robert A. Dentler and James W. Elsbery, "Big City School Desegregation: Trends and Methods," *National Conference of Equal Educational Opportunity in American Cities*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1967, pp. 305-324.

[9] John Fischer, Kenneth Clark, and Judah Cahn, *Desegregating the Public Schools of New York City*. Albany: New York State Education Department, 1964.

[10] Richard Barrett and Barbara Heller, *Expand and Improve*. New York: Center for Urban Education, 1970.

[11] Program Reference Service, *Open Door: New York City*. New York: Center for Urban Education, 1971. See also Lillian Weber, *The English Infant School and Informal Education*. A Center for Urban Education Book, Prentice Hall, 1971.

[12] Program Reference Service, *Beginning Reading and Math in P.S. 133, New York City*. New York: Center for Urban Education, 1971.

[13] For comprehensive analysis of middle and intermediate schools, see Lawrence J. Barnett, et al, editors, *The School in the Middle*. New York: Center for Urban Education, 1969.

[14] John Bremer, et al, *The School Without Walls: Philadelphia's Parkway Program*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

[15] Raymond Drescher, *Preliminary Report on the Satellite Academies Program*. New York: Center for Urban Education, mimeographed, 1971.

[16] Mortimer Kreuter, *Feasibility Study for Proposed Teachers College in Harlem*. Conducted for the New York City Board of Higher Education. New York: Center for Urban Education, 1967. Also, Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., *A Study of Attitudes Toward a Four Year Teachers College in the Harlem Area*, New York: Center for Urban Education, 1967.

[17] Gerry Rosenfeld, *A Study of the New York University Clinic for Learning Project*. New York: Center for Urban Education, 1970.

[18] George R. LaNoue and Bruce L. R. Smith, *The Politics of School Decentralization*. New York: Center for Urban Education, mimeographed, 1969. Also, Agee Ward, "Ocean Hill: Education, Community, Power and the Media," *The Center Forum*, Vol. 3, November 13, 1968, pp. 1-10.

[19] In 1968, a peak year, expenditures from all sources for educational development amounted to about $220 million, or slightly more than 1/5 of 1% of the $54.6 billion spent on education throughout the country. From *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Winter 1970.

[20] Wilson C. Riles, *The Urban Education Task Force Report*, New York: Frederick Praeger, 1970.

[21] *The School Without Walls, Op. Cit.*, p. 271.

9