

Impacts on Education in Regional Areas



Harry C. Brearley, a beloved and devoted professor of sociology to some of us for many years at George Peabody College, used to describe the changing social scene in America with:

Cotton's going West;
Cattle's coming East;
Negroes are going North;
And we're all going to town.

Although he predicted it, and described in considerable detail the seeds that have produced today's city ghettos, he could not have imagined the sickness of today's inner city. Neither did he see the full impact of the exodus of large numbers from rural areas upon those remaining, especially when coupled with the rapid advances in technology and the explosive social changes. Writing about Appalachia, where cultural and economic changes have perhaps been most pronounced, Jack Weller vividly told the story in *Yesterday's People*.

During the years of and following World War II, the advent of automation and of improved transportation heralded a period of unequalled prosperity throughout the nation—except in Appalachia.

In Appalachia, records were set in unemployment and in the loss of population.

Automation required skilled workers, but Appalachia had not produced them. Skilled men came in to take the few jobs available. Many of the young, energetic, and ambitious migrated to other regions where jobs were available, leaving Appalachia with a disproportionately large share of the old, the infirm, and the indolent. Welfare rolls bulged.

Thus, we have the roots of the Appalachia of today. It is characterized by conservatism and isolationism, holding to the status quo. It has a wealth of natural resources, controlled mostly by outside interests. There is an oversupply of unskilled labor and dependent people; there is an undersupply of productive workers; for nothing in the history of the region has caused its people to demand a high quality of education. They are neither less nor more intelligent than their "brothers" across the hills. Education can be their key to a better tomorrow.

Most of the difficulties facing education in Appalachia are prevalent throughout the nation, but some are peculiar to the region. Many of the latter have been engendered by

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the socioeconomic pattern imposed on the region by its historical development and geography. A vicious cycle of poverty and poor education has been generated and perpetuated. Numerous agencies now are joining in an effort to break this cycle.

These introductory statements, general in nature, must not be misconstrued. Many schools and school systems in the region are offering an education equal to or substantially above the national average, but they are too few and widely scattered. Progress on a broad front is needed.

A General Isolation

Regional conditions—geographic, economic, social, and political—have produced a profound effect on education. The status quo has barely been maintained as a result of an inadequate tax base and resistance to tax increases for the support of schools. These and other factors have combined to produce resistance and obstacles to needed school improvements. Within the framework of lower than average financial support and smaller than average schools, there has been a correspondingly less than average updating of educational operations and practices. Less than average belief in the general need for an improved educational program also exists.

Geographic factors which have contributed to a general isolation also have resulted in the existence of an unusually large number of small schools in the region. Such schools usually have sparse course offerings and poorly prepared, poorly paid teachers. The economic factors which have helped to cause an out-migration of population in general have had a parallel effect on education. Many trained and experienced educational personnel have left the region. It is estimated that only one-third of the college graduates trained to teach remain in the region. Many teaching vacancies must be filled with people possessing only minimal certification.

There is a diminishing demand for unskilled labor throughout the nation and an increasing demand for skilled labor within Appalachia. There is also a demand for more

education. With small schools poorly prepared to offer a comprehensive program, however, the educational system is being subjected to increasing pressure to offer specialized instruction. In the areas where a high number of dropouts and a low number of college-bound pupils are found, there is a distressingly low number of vocational education programs. Special education classes for mentally and physically handicapped children are not provided in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of those pupils.

Superintendents, state and local, and other administrators and supervisors look at the educational problems realistically and attempt to solve them. However, there are many constraints within Appalachia that virtually preclude any major breakthrough in the existing educational system. In many local school systems, most of the professional staff is native-born, is a product of the local school system, and has acquired college training from an institution within 100 miles. Governing boards similarly are limited to the local community perspective. Employment and advancement are frequently reserved for or offered first to those within the system.

The curriculum and program of instruction are things that "are" rather than things "to be worked on." Little is done to provide curricular or instructional guidance to the teacher. Even new programs initiated at the state level often are implemented only with reference to what the local citizenry might or might not accept. A major portion of administrative attention is devoted to management, finances, and the avoidance of controversy.

To summarize, the educational system in Appalachia is a product of the social, economic, and geographic features of the region. It might be generally characterized as conservative, inbred, inadequately financed, fragmented, and unlikely to produce change from within.

However, even in school systems in the nation where greater progress is in evidence than in Appalachia, conventional approaches to education *per se* are being seriously questioned. Even if Appalachia did catch up in conventional approaches aimed at attaining

quality education, it could still be far behind.

Increased funds are being made available for the improvement of education in Appalachia. With the increased emphasis on the improvement of educational opportunities for the deprived, there are strong possibilities that even larger allocations may be available in the near future. On a cost-quality relationship, however, the region may not be getting the maximum benefits from its present educational expenditures and/or may not be prepared to make maximum gains from greatly increased expenditures of funds.

The problem is simply that *major changes in education which would affect the region and offer a breakthrough in educational practices cannot be implemented through the existing structure of education using the conventional approaches to change and improvement.* Regional isolation and geographic barriers within the region preclude the progress that is needed immediately. Schools and educational practices are captives of the economic, social, and political warp and woof of the region.

Educational leadership, with its present support and facing existing obstacles, cannot overcome the limitations. Facilities cannot be updated rapidly enough. Personnel cannot be trained sufficiently. There is not enough receptivity, know-how, and skill to assimilate and employ research findings. There is not sufficient time or resources for adequate educational development by the grass roots approach—teacher by teacher, school by school, and system by system—and conventional approaches everywhere are being seriously questioned.

To Leapfrog Ahead

Most agencies and institutions looking at the educational scene realistically reflect a common interest—they are not thinking about closing the gap; they want to leapfrog ahead. Through our joint efforts, we must find solutions. We must not expend our resources to do those things which are commonly being done; our aim must not be to patch up education; we need not try to catch

up; we must strive to reconstruct education.

The Appalachian Regional Commission is putting a major effort into the improvement of vocational training; the upgrading of professional staff; and is investigating formal programs for preschool education. Many colleges and universities have employed specialists to relate their program to the problems of the region. They are assisting all agencies and institutions to increase their effectiveness in the region. The Pennsylvania State University, for example, is rapidly developing Computer-Assisted Instruction and designing it specifically for the training of teachers and students in the Appalachian region.

The AFL-CIO Appalachian Council is investing \$1,500,000 in a program of health services and guidance and counseling to be contained in five boxcars to be moved through the region over hundreds of miles of abandoned railroad tracks. Various groups and organizations—the Council of the Southern Mountains, the Southern Regional Council, the Governors' Compact, and others—are concentrating as never before on producing solutions to real problems. We may expect our success and contributions to be in direct proportion to the quality of new ideas being introduced into the processes of education.

The Educational Cooperative

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory is committed to the idea of creating a new educational process within which the total range of educational activities can be conducted—new modes of teaching individuals and groups of students, new roles for teachers, new curricula, and a new approach to marshaling educational resources. We call it the "Educational Cooperative."

The Educational Cooperative would be developed by a cluster of school districts joining together, while still maintaining their individual autonomy, to establish an educational process featuring the extensive use of communications media, new technology, and mobile facilities as integral parts of the delivery system of education. AEL is committed to the development of (a) an administra-

tive system for the Educational Cooperative, (b) a delivery system, and (c) new curriculum and instruction for it.

Work already has begun in six field sites from Pennsylvania to Tennessee. School superintendents, with authorization from their respective boards, college and university personnel, and state department representatives are serving on cooperative boards and directing staff in this new design for educational operations. New approaches to in-service education, conducting interaction analysis with the use of self-instructional kits and telelecture, are being developed. Also, in-service education in modern mathematics for elementary teachers using mobilized computers is being field tested. These programs are reaching into the hills and hollows.

A preschool education program for ages 3-5 has been developed and is being field tested, providing a 30-minute TV program projected daily into the home, one home visit per week, and one small group experience per week in a mobile facility especially designed for preschool children's activities. A similar

approach is being made to vocational guidance employing TV and aperture cards for a Vocational Information System and a Student Data Bank.

A new approach to driver education is being conducted in one site—the one program for seven school districts, combining TV instruction, training on mobilized simulators, and the individual teacher in behind-the-wheel training. Other courses in physics, chemistry, biology, creative writing, French, and algebra are being shared among schools through a telelecture network and use of the Electrowriter.

Characteristic of all of these programs and activities is the fact that they are being developed and shared in a cluster of school systems—the future structure for the Educational Cooperative. Multi-media means for delivery are being employed. These programs and activities lend themselves to improved quality; they capitalize upon teacher competency; and they increase accessibility by spanning time, space, and geographical barriers. □



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