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A Note from Brian Powell, Chair

As state educational systems are being encouraged to “race to the top,” I suspect that many members of this section are racing to the end of this semester. In the event you need a break from the endless grading, reviewing, and committee work that you’re in the midst of, newsletter editor Anne McDaniel has included several articles/columns of great interest—notably, a brief interview with John Meyer and an essay by Melissa Evans-Andris on recent Department of Education initiatives.

In anticipation of the upcoming ASA meetings, the newsletter also includes a partial listing of Sociology of Education paper sessions. Many thanks to Jenny Stuber and Rob Warren for organizing the Sociology of Education section paper and roundtable sessions and Dennis Condron for organizing the regular sessions on education. Officially, the Sociology of Education section day is Sunday, August 15, which means that most paper and roundtable sessions will be on that day. Some sessions, however, will be on the preceding or subsequent day, and the Sociology of Education reception and dinner will be on Saturday, August 14. The local arrangements committee of Jim Ainsworth, Dennis Condron, and Regina Werum has come up with an outstanding choice for the section dinner: Max Lager’s, which not only is just walking distance from convention hotels but also is known for its excellent cuisine and in-house brewery. Information regarding the dinner is provided later in the newsletter.

Finally, a reminder to vote in the upcoming ASA elections. Our section has an embarrassment of riches: it is going to be very difficult to choose among the highly talented, resourceful, and energetic candidates for section president and council. You should be receiving ballots shortly. It’s time for me to get back to the race. See you in August.

Brian Powell
Race To the Top

By Melissa Evans-Andris

Melissa Evans-Andris is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Louisville. Her research focuses on school reform, sustainability of school improvement, and teacher quality. Recently she directed two research efforts, including a federal study entitled “Comprehensive School Reform, Educational Dynamics, and Achievement in Kentucky Middle Schools” and a state project entitled “A Research Study of the Kentucky Teacher Internship Program Pilot Project” that tracked the experiences of new teacher-interns during their first three years on the job. She is active in local and statewide discussion forums related to improvement in Kentucky schools. She can be reached at mevans@louisville.edu.

Race to the Top (RTTT) is a $4.3 billion education reform program enacted as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). In a July 24, 2009 R2T webcast, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan touted RTTT as an “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the federal government to create incentives for far-reaching improvement in our nation’s schools.” This essay offers a brief summary of the legislation, examines its implications for education, and considers what contributions sociologists may make in this present reform effort.

Competitive versus formula funding
RTTT is premised on the idea that competition for funding will stimulate innovation and excellence in education more effectively than traditional funding formulas that often have resulted in stagnation and complacency. In keeping with that, RTTT encourages states to vie for sizeable four-year project awards to increase student achievement and educational performance in K-12 education. Only states without legal barriers to linking student achievement data to teachers and principals are eligible to apply for RTTT funds. States permitting alternative education management organizations, most notably charter schools, also have a competitive edge. These requirements alone already have spawned change. For example, prior to the recent awards announcement in early April, at least 16 states had enacted legislation or regulatory changes, such as expanding the use of charter schools or allowing the use of student test scores to assess teacher performance, to position themselves more competitively for funding eligibility (Shear & Anderson, 2009).

Four areas of reform
Proposals for RTTT funds must present comprehensive and integrated reform implementation plans that address each of four targeted areas. These include enhancing standards and assessments, improving data systems to support instruction, increasing the supply of great teachers and leaders, and turning around struggling, low performing schools.

Enhancing standards and assessments. This priority urges states to adopt common, rigorous, curricular standards that indicate what children should know and be able to do and to prepare them for success in postsecondary education and careers (Shear & Anderson, 2009).
Correspondingly, states are urged to adopt assessments that effectively measure student knowledge and performance.

**Improving data systems to support instruction.** This priority calls for states to create longitudinal data systems to identify and track growth in student achievement at the individual level. They will also link student and teacher data to inform and improve instructional practice. Finally, data will be accessible to key stakeholders to inform research and guide educational decision making.

**Increasing great teachers and leaders.** This priority calls for educational systems to recognize and differentiate teachers and principals according to their effectiveness, retain quality teachers and replace others; increase quality, especially in high demand subjects and hard to staff schools; further develop alternate routes to teacher certification; increase supply and distribution of highly effective teachers and principals in high-need schools and shortage subject areas; and increase teacher effectiveness.

**Turning around low performing schools.** This priority urges states to exert authority to turnaround its lowest 5% of struggling schools. Improvement strategies may include developing a policy framework that supports reconstitution; permitting high-quality charter schools or other education management organizations to intervene; or in the most extreme cases, closing the school. In instances such as rural, isolated schools, where these options are not feasible, an alternative transformation strategy may be implemented that replaces school leadership but not faculty.

In addition to pre-award competitive positioning and detailing plans to address changes in the four key areas, RTTT proposals also must stipulate designs for expansion of reform efforts as well as strategies for reform sustainability. Finally, applicants must demonstrate buy-in from key stakeholders at the state and district levels, along with unions to increase the likelihood that schools will cooperate in the spirit of innovation and improvement.

**Concerns and controversy**

Not surprisingly, RTTT raises numerous concerns and controversy. First, because of its emphasis on standards and assessment, RTTT may be seen as a continued shift begun decades ago towards centralization of authority over local education from the local and state level to the federal government. Alternatively, others view that in RTTT, the federal government has taken on a fairly non-traditional role by setting broad educational priorities in four areas, allocating funding based on competition among states, but then leaving them to their own discretion in how best to address the priorities.

Second, contrary to what some expected, RTTT increased, rather than reduced, reliance on student testing to measure performance but also to evaluate teachers. Linking student performance to teacher effectiveness may spark intense controversy and backlash from teacher unions and others. Even so, it is worthwhile to note that many states submitted proposals in the first round with endorsement of their state and local unions.
A third area of concern involves strategies to turn around low performing schools. Like other reform initiatives in recent decades that have had little impact on the educational progress of low performing schools, such as the Comprehensive School Reform program, some might argue that the reform approaches advocated by RTTT lack demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. For example, charter schools do not necessarily perform better.

Finally, RTTT raises concerns about the elusiveness of sustaining reform efforts in schools. Despite repeated attempts to improve educational systems, much about schools, curriculum, and pedagogy have remained relatively stable over time. Further, there is little agreement about why reform efforts may fail to incorporate improvements that are sustained over time. On the other hand, reform has a greater chance of being sustained when it is accompanied by five conditions (Evans-Andris, 2010). These include 1) a sound state infrastructure to provide support for improvement in a way that is coherent, integrated, and respects the decision-making capacity of the local educational agencies; 2) broad-based district support to guide and assist schools in implementing effective reform-related instructional strategies; 3) leaders and teachers who are committed to innovation and excellence, supportive of each others’ work, and willing to cultivate and distribute responsibility for leadership of change to others; 4) cooperation and commitment from faculty that is reinforced through respect for their professional autonomy and decision-making capacity; 5) observable gains based both on assessment measures and qualitative indicators of culture, climate, and engagement that link back to workplace satisfaction and related conditions promoting high quality teaching and learning.

Many aspects of RTTT embrace these conditions. Its stringent eligibility requirements coupled with the buy-in that stakeholders must demonstrate will pave the way for supportive and effective state, district, and union partnerships. These, along with reform implementation targeting curricular standards and assessments, school leadership and teaching, strategies to turn around low performing schools, and ways to mark progress and gains longitudinally are consistent with the five requisite conditions for sustainability outlined above. Thus, more than other reforms in recent decades, RTTT shows promise of achieving intended effects that are sustainable.

Roles for Sociologists
RTTT creates a host of opportunities for the contributions of sociologists. As with earlier reforms, researchers having a sociological perspective are best situated to identify, study, and contribute to the understanding of challenges posed to educational systems serving high concentrations of minority students, children from low income families, students with special needs, and how these and other demographic characteristics relate to patterns of school performance and student achievement.

Unlike studies of earlier reforms that have been severely hampered by limitations of student performance data, with RTTT, new data systems will offer researchers unprecedented opportunities to identify and better explain what leads to and limits growth in performance among all student groups over time.
Sociologists of work and occupations may consider studying challenges of labor and collective bargaining posed by RTTT, occupational dynamics among teachers and leaders under conditions of scrutiny made possible by new data systems, and/or systems of merit based pay, and partnerships and collaboration among state and local educational agencies and teacher unions. Organizational scholars may contribute to studies on innovation and the implementation of change in schools, turnaround strategies and conditions under which they are most effective, or the sustainability of reform over time. Policy analysts may want to consider how the federal government’s role is becoming defined in new ways and the implications of that for the longer term. Finally, RTTT initiatives call for program evaluations as well as others studies to assess the broad range of strategies used for turning around, managing, or reconstituting low performing schools. Through all the opportunities mentioned here, there is a pressing need to conduct and report research in ethical, responsible ways that enrich understanding of critical social-educational issues and also effectively and respectfully inform practice.

Certainly, RTTT has caught the attention of state educational agencies and others. Hoping to cash in on that “once in a lifetime opportunity,” 41 states applied for funding in the first of two funding rounds. Of those, 16 were identified as finalists, and only two – Delaware and Tennessee - were selected to receive awards of $100 million and $500 million, respectively, in federal funding in early April. According to the New Teacher Project, both award-winning proposals detailed “bold, comprehensive visions of reform and demonstrated the ability to make them a reality” (p2). Phase II applications are due June 1 and award winners will be announced in Fall 2010.

References:


*For the insight and knowledge he shared, Dr. Evans-Andris would like to recognize and thank Justin M. Bathon, J.D./Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership Studies, University of Kentucky.
Five Questions to ... John Meyer

by Patricia Bromley

John Meyer is a Professor Emeritus of Sociology and (by courtesy) Education, a faculty member at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law and a senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. His work focuses on the spread of modern institutions around the world, and their impact on national states and societies – particularly the spread and impact of scientific activity and the standardization of educational models.

Patricia Bromley is a doctoral candidate in the School of Education and a Master’s candidate in the Department of Sociology at Stanford University. Her research interests include cross-national, longitudinal comparisons of citizenship education, especially as related to issues of human rights and diversity; and professionalization of civil society organizations and the human rights movement.

In your recent book, World Society, you reflect on the evolution of neo-institutional and world society theory in sociology, and synthesize applications to a broad range of fields. In your view, what are the main contributions of this theoretical tradition to the sociology of education?

The biggest impact has been to help explain the worldwide expansion and curricular evolution of modern education. Secondarily, these approaches have been used to understand the structure of educational organizations. There has been weaker influence on ideas and research about educational effects on individuals, and the collective-level effects of education on social structure. Sociologists have not dealt well with the extent to which the role structure of modern society is itself constituted by education, and retain an unrealistic and outdated view of modern society as made up of political and economic structures served (rather than created) by education. For instance, we sociologists talk about “socio-economic status” when we mean education (or occupational roles principally defined by educational value).

In your research social and educational change is characterized as a macro-level process driven by institutions. Individuals are depicted mainly as the bearers of institutional roles rather than highly autonomous actors. What challenges do you find accompany this approach?

Institutional theory sits less comfortably with American social theory and cultural ideology than with European versions. American social science tends to suppose society is a product of fairly coherently purposive individual and organizational actors, and is intellectually (and normatively) uncomfortable with other models. So American sociologists of education – who for the most part went to college without having decided to – tend to treat college attendance as the product of socially influenced decisions, rather than non-decisions. This tends to distort analyses (and research designs): for instance, the weak positive effects of “teacher
encouragement” reflect the fact that teachers don’t encourage a student to do the obvious. Our instruments don’t reflect the influence of things both teachers and college-bound students take for granted.

Another distinguishing feature of your research is a view that schools are central in reflecting and producing culture, in a sense that extends beyond traditional anthropological dimensions. How is "culture" defined in your work?

I haven’t worked with a very explicit definition. But I use the idea of culture to cover matters taken for granted in society, rather than distributions of individual attitudes and opinions. So "college graduate" is now an important cultural element, worldwide, as is "economics," and the modern institutionalized educational system maintains both. They are cultural in that many cognitive models, and assumptions, are involved in these. Further, they clearly transcend specific organizational arrangements, which in fact often heavily depend on them, and usually can do little to really modify them. For example, specific colleges, or departments of economics, may tinker at the margins, but their authority and their success (striking in the modern system) depends on the broader category. American sociological thinking tends to suppose that core cultural categories like these are simple products of highly interested and sometimes rational actors, but this grossly understates the cultural and doctrinal origins of the categories (and of often-surprising changes in them).

You've been active in field of sociology of education for over 40 years. What are the biggest changes you've experienced? Has the field gone in any unexpected directions?

Major changes include the great expansion (and to some extent, globalization) in data sets, data quality, and in the numbers of technically sophisticated analysts. Comparative and historical analyses are also now more extensive and informed. The major unexpected element to me has been the narrowness of the focus of the field to the "policy" assessment of whether education produces achievement and attainment, and equality in these, often with an American emphasis. Other areas of inquiry remain rather marginalized: the sources of educational change, the quality of life and its satisfactions in the schools, and most astonishingly the changing curricular and pedagogical content of education. If a sociologist of education knows anything about what is taught in schools, it is unlikely to have come from our journals – most likely he/she has kids in school.

What do you think will be some important lines of research in the coming years, both within neo-institutional theory and in the field of sociology of education in general?

It seems clear that the policy-linked focus on equality in achievement and attainment will remain central, though broader intellectual returns for research in this area will probably be modest. I would like to see more attention to the role of (perhaps especially higher) education in creating or sustaining or legitimating the "knowledge society," in which many roles depend very heavily on cultural bases in schools rather than any clear social functions or social exchanges. On the other side, older (often elite) roles, rooted in canonical cultural material,
have obviously been undercut. I would also like to see more attention to the social and cultural life of the school. In studying adult workers, we give much sociological attention to such matters, but we seem to study children and students simply as products to be targeted on equal or unequal futures – pre-persons rather than persons. My concern is not normative, but analytical: modern educational systems cannot be understood without taking into account the increasingly legitimated perspectives of children, who now make legitimated and structured “choices.” In this sense, the sociological obsession with equality should be analyzed as a dependent variable in the changed post-modern culture.

Questions asked by Patricia Bromley
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Sociology of Education at the 2010 ASA Meeting

At this time, complete information on regular sessions and roundtables, including paper titles and presenters are not available. Please check ASA’s website (www.asanet.org) on April 30th for a complete copy of the ASA program. Dates and times of sessions and roundtables, as well as more detailed information on the Sociology of Education reception, dinner, and business meeting will be published in the next newsletter.

Section Sessions

The Limits and Possibilities of School Reform
- A Resume to Participate: Parents, Social Class, and Collective Engagement in Urban Public Schooling, Linn Posey, University of Wisconsin, Madison
- Do Educators “Teach to the Test”? Jennifer L. Jennings, Columbia University; Jonathan Marc Bearak, New York University
- In What Contexts Do People Support Raising Taxes? Voter Support for School Funding Referenda, Jim Saliba, University of Minnesota; John Robert Warren, University of Minnesota

The Perils of Public Schooling: Sex and Violence
- Educational Behavior and Associations with Perceptions of Legal Entitlements, Disciplinary Strictness and Disciplinary Fairness, Doreet Rebecca Preiss, New York University; et al.
- Hooking Up in High School: Adolescent Sex and Educational Outcomes, Bill McCarthy, UC Davis; Eric Grodsky, University of Minnesota
- Responding to Bullies: Victim and Bystander Responses to Negative Peer Interactions in Elementary School, Brent Harger, Albright College
- Sex Education and the Construction of "Proper" Sexual Practices, Phil Redman, University of Chicago
Micro-/Micro-Perspectives on Educational Inequality

- Movers and Choosers: Linking School Choice Policy and Social Capital, *Joshua Saldana, UC Irvine*

- Understanding Racial Homophily, Network Formation, and Academic Achievement in Latino Student Peer Networks, *Chad Jereme Nash, University of Arizona; Regina Deil-Amen, University of Arizona*

- In the Crowd: Effects of Second-Degree Peers on Educational Outcomes, *William J. Carbonaro, University of Notre Dame; Joseph Workman, University of Notre Dame*

- The Gender Gap in Higher Education in Europe: The Impact of Individual and National Characteristics, *Anne McDaniel, Ohio State University*

- Educational Equality and Quality in Comparison, *Fabian T. Pfeffer, University of Wisconsin, Madison*

Families and the Intergenerational Transmission of Advantage

- Parenting and Academic Achievement: Intergenerational Transmission of Educational Advantage, *Josipa Roksa, University of Virginia; Daniel J. Potter, University of Virginia*

- Multidimensionality in the Intergenerational Transmission of Mothers’ Education: Quantities, Qualities, and Credentials, *Megan Andrew, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

- Trajectories of Family Instability and Adolescent Educational Pathways, *Holly E. Heard, Rice University*

- Poverty and Postsecondary Educational Pathways, *Cynthia Feliciano, University of California, Irvine*

- Japanese Transnational Families’ Habitus Dislocation: Drawing Symbolic Boundaries against Domestic Elites, *Hiroki Igarashi, University of Hawaii at Manoa*
Regular Sessions

1. The Transition to College and Higher Education
2. School, Neighborhood, and Community Contexts
3. Parents, Schools, and Students
4. Education Outside the U.S.
5. Achievement Gaps

Sociology of Education Roundtables

1. Academic Achievement
2. Culture & Religion
3. Curriculum
4. Discipline & Security
5. Education Policy
6. Gender
7. Geography & Demography
8. Health
9. Inequality
10. Macro-Social/Economic Issues
11. Parents
12. Post-Post-Secondary Schooling
13. Post-Secondary: Access
14. Post-Secondary: Curriculum
15. Post-Secondary: Potpourri I
16. Post-Secondary: Potpourri II
17. Post-Secondary: Transitions to College
18. Primary Schooling
19. Race/Ethnicity
20. School Structure & Reform
21. Secondary Schooling
22. Social Life / Capital
23. Teachers
Annual Sociology of Education Dinner

Immediately following the Section Reception
Saturday, August 14, 2010

Our Local Arrangements Committee members, Dennis Condron, Jim Ainsworth, and Regina Werum have found a wonderful setting for our Section dinner that provides that vital combination of good food, good drink, and good friends. Please mark you calendars!

Max Lager’s Wood-Fired Grill and Brewery
320 Peachtree Street, Atlanta
http://maxlagers.com/

Detailed information on cost, menu, and payment information will be sent to section members as soon as it becomes available and will be published in the next newsletter.
News from Section Members: Books

Post-War History Education in Japan and the Germanys: Guilty Lessons by Julian Dierkes

How did East and West Germany and Japan reconstitute national identity after World War II? Did all three experience parallel reactions to national trauma and reconstruction? History education shaped how these nations reconceived their national identities. Because the content of history education was controlled by different actors, history education materials framed national identity in very different ways. In Japan, where the curriculum was controlled by bureaucrats bent on maintaining their purported neutrality, materials focused on the empirical building blocks of history (who? where? what?) at the expense of discussions of historical responsibility. In East Germany, where party cadres controlled the curriculum, students were taught that World War II was a capitalist aberration. In (West) Germany, where teachers controlled the curriculum, students were taught the lessons of shame and then regeneration after historians turned away from grand national narratives. This book shows that constructions of national identity are not easily malleable on the basis of moral and political concerns only, but that they are subject to institutional constraints and opportunities. In an age when post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation has become a major focus of international policies, the analysis offers important implications for the parallel revision of portrayals of national history and the institutional reconstruction of policy-making regimes.
News from Section Members: Awards and Announcement

Jeanne Ballantine, Professor of Sociology at Wright State University, is this year’s recipient of the North Central Sociological Association’s J. Milton Yinger Lifetime Distinguished Career Award.

Kenneth A. Feldman, Professor of Sociology at SUNY-Stony Brook, has received the Howard R. Bowen Distinguished Career Award from the Association for the Student of Higher Education (ASHE).

S. Michael Gaddis, a graduate student in Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been named the winner of the 2010 Odum Award for Outstanding Graduate Student Paper from the Southern Sociological Society for the paper “What's in a Relationship? Examining Race, Class, and Contact Time as Determinants of Social Capital in Mentoring Relationships.”

Robert M. Hauser, Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, delivered the “Distinguished Lecture” entitled “Causes and Consequences of Cognitive Functioning Across the Life Course” at the 2009 meetings of the American Educational Research Association, which appears in the March 2010 issue of Educational Researcher. Professor Hauser has recently been appointed co-chair (with Christopher Edley Jr., Dean, School of Law, University of California-Berkeley) of a New National Research Council panel study from the National Academy of Science that will evaluate the public schools of the District of Columbia. The five-year study, mandated by the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007, will determine whether sufficient progress in public education has been achieved to warrant continuation of the provisions and requirements of this act or whether a new law, or a new system of education, should be enacted by the District government.

David L. Levinson, President of Norwalk Community College, authored an article, “Grand Solution or Grab Bag?” about community colleges and student success as part of a special report "Inequality Goes to College" that appeared in the November 2009 issue of The American Prospect.

Yingyi Ma, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Syracuse University, along with colleagues in the departments of engineering, higher education and national security, has received a grant from the National Science Foundation’s Engineering Education Division for the project “From Battlefield to Classroom: Designing Pathways to Engineering for American GIs.” The interdisciplinary project will study the effect of post/9-11 GI bill on veteran’s educational aspirations, and particularly their aspiration for engineering education.

Charles V. Willie, the Charles W. Eliot Professor of Education Emeritus, Harvard Graduate School of Education, has continued to experiment with the use of case studies as ways of teaching about the sociology of education in elementary, secondary and higher education schools. Rowman and Littlefield published Grassroots Social Action: Lessons in People Power Movements edited by Willie, Steven Ridini and David Willard in 2008, which includes four case studies that include white, black and brown populations and are analyzed to determine why some case studies were effective and why other case studies were not.

Regina Werum, Associate Professor at Emory University, will shortly begin a two-year term as National Science Foundation Sociology Program Director.

The Foundations of Education program at Northern Illinois University announces a new Sociology of Education concentration for Master’s students, emphasizing sociological theory and empirical research, the sociological analysis of classrooms, and the sociology of urban education. For more information, please visit our webpage: http://www.cedu.niu.edu/lepf/foundations/index.shtml.
In the next issue.....

- Five questions to another senior sociology of education scholar
- Another exciting piece related to policy and the sociology of education
- It should have been a classic
- Detailed Information about ASA 2010

Submit contributions for the next newsletter to
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