
EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

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In the modern world, education has become one of the clearer symbols of prestige and status. The United States of America, like some other countries, attempts to offer education to the masses of the people for Americans have recognized education as the foundation of democracy. A major promise of American society, born of a literal belief in the equality of mankind and a strong belief in common man, is the attempt to make education and schools the chief agent of social mobility, a means of self-improvement available to all. Since Americans have recognized education as the foundation of democracy, it follows that all children should be guaranteed equal opportunity. Kandel, in his article on "Some Unsolved Issues in American Education," stated.

1. Kandel, I.L., "Some Unsolved Issues in American Education," *Educational Forum*, Vol. 20, (March, 1956); pp. 269-278

"There are two characteristic convictions that mark the American system of education. The first of these is the faith of the American people in education, and the second is the belief in the right of all the children of all the people to equality of educational opportunity."¹

Equality of educational opportunity is now established and stable as an aim for education in theory and practice. It also becomes one of the dominating factors in educational philosophy in the United States today.

During recent years up to the present time, the term "Equality of Educational

Opportunity" has become the subject of great debate and critical issue among educators and scholars. Among the various controversies, the disagreement over the meaning of equality of educational opportunity is a crucial one. Lieberman, in his article on "Equality of Educational Opportunity" discussed this important issue from a theoretical point of view and suggested two meanings of the concept :

"One suggested meaning is that A and B have equality of educational opportunity when they live under conditions which do not provide either person with any material advantage over the other in selecting or pursuing his educational goals. The other meaning which seems to be often given to "equality of educational opportunity" is that A and B have equality of educational opportunity when the material advantages which one of them possesses over the other in selecting or pursuing his educational goals cannot be removed without endangering other important values."²

This definition emphasizes providing equal treatment for all children regardless of race, social class and economic status. This definition also assumes that people have some sophistication about the conditions that constitute inequality, but there is no doubt that even the persons who have this definition in mind are often unaware of the range of conditions that affect equality of educational opportunity. Lieberman's discussion also relates to the problems of segregated schools. He pointed out the fact that racially segregated schools or racial segregation is one of the crucial issues that causes inequality of educational opportunity. .

Beard, in his book "A Charter for the Social Science in Schools," noted :

"All are entitled to the fullest possible educational opportunity It is also agreed that the opportunity should be limited in time and nature only by the ability of the individual to profit from its benefits."³

2. Lieberman, Myron, "Equality of Educational Opportunity," *Harvard Educational Review*, Summer, 1959; pp. 167 - 183

3. Beard, Charles A., *A Charter of the Social Sciences in Schools, Part I*, American Historical Association, New York, 1952; pp. 64

Beard interpreted the concept of equality of educational opportunity in terms of "individual differences" or "individual ability." He also emphasized the fullest possible educational opportunity for all children regardless of race, social class and economic status. The idea of "individual ability" in equality of educational opportunity, at the present time, is receiving greater attention not only from educators and people in this country but also from educators in the foreign lands especially European countries.

John Vaizey, an English educator, indicated in his book "Britain in the Sixties Education for Tomorrow," that:

"One of the great drives towards improvement in education has always come from the passionate concern of reformers with equality. Until recently this was defined simply as equality of opportunity - that, given the opening, those with intelligence would rise to the top. It ^{is} was believed that there were many working class girls and boys who,

if offered the chance, could become great statesman, great scientists, or great writers Scholarships were created to provide places for children of high ability.'⁴

Counts also emphasized individual differences. He mentioned in his book, "The Selective Character of American Education," that:

"It must be maintained that the idea of equality of educational opportunity does not mean sameness of opportunity nor does it mean necessarily equality in years of educational experience. The endowment of the individual must be recognized in each case,'⁵

Nania, in his article "Equal Educational Opportunity - An American Myth;" insisted that "equality of educational opportunity—this does not mean that all children will be guaranteed the same education. Equal educational opportunity means the chance for

4. Vaizey, John, Britain in the Sixties, Penguin Books, 1962; pp, 12 — 20

5. Counts, George S., The Selective Character of American Education, Chicago University Press, 1922, pp. 149

the type of education that will benefit each child to the utmost, based upon his ability, interests, and needs."⁶

Gardner reported in the "Pursuit of Excellence," emphasizing individual differences, that "the great advantage of the concept of equality of opportunity is that it candidly recognizes differences in endowment and motivation and accepts the certainty of differences in achievement by allowing free play to these differences, it preserves the freedom to excel which counts for so much in terms of individual aspirations, and has produced so much of mankind's greatness."⁷

It is evident from the various studies and different interpretations of the meanings of equality of educational opportunity cited that the idea of equality of opportunity can be defined in three different meanings: legal, psycho-philosophical and practical meaning.

Legal Meaning. The interpretation of equality of educational opportunity which is based on legal analysis involves interpretation of the part of the 14th. Amendment which reads "...nor shall any state....deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." The case which is considered to be inequality of educational opportunity is the segregated school system for Negroes. Even though the Supreme Court integration decision of 1954 held that a segregated school system resulted in inequality of educational opportunity, this problem is still an unfinished issue in American education. Lieberman noted that "from a legal point of view at least, procedural quality within an educational institution, as well as procedural equality in determination of who shall be admitted to the institution, is an important ingredient of equality of educational opportunity per se. They were concerned chiefly with the question of whether specific state laws relating to educational opportunity provided equal protection of the laws."⁸

6. Nania, Frank, "Equal Educational Opportunity—An American Myth," *Educational Administration and Supervision*, (January, 1959); pp. 45—47

7. *The Pursuit of Excellence - Education and the Future of America*, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc., 1958; pp. 16

8. Lieberman, Myron, "Equality of Educational Opportunity," *Harvard Educational Review*, Summer, 1959, pp. 269—278

Psycho — philosophical Meaning.

Some outstanding educators and scholars such as Beard, Gardner, Kandel, Conant and others have given a meaning to the term "equality of educational opportunity" in terms of psycho-philosophical analysis. These educators define it as "the attempt of educators to widen the horizon and extend the base of the curriculum." They believe that each child should have the opportunity under competent guidance to develop fully and richly as an individual and as a cooperating member of the society. They emphasize individual differences and the provision for each child to develop his potential to the fullest. Kandel, from the point of view of philosophy and comparative education, criticized the interpretation of equality of opportunity in education in the name of democracy as leading to a certain disregard of quality and neglect of the able students. Conant,⁹ in his report, "American High School Today," also recommended that the program of study for the academically talented and the highly gifted pupils be improved because the current curriculum does not help adequately these able students to develop to their utmost. Now-a-days, schooling for

gifted child becomes one of the crucial issues in American education. The proponents of the interpretation of equality of educational opportunity which is based on psycho-philosophical basis advocate that the neglect of individual differences and the lack of suitable program of study for the pupils of different levels of ability is an inequality of educational opportunity.

Practical Meaning. To most people, equality of educational opportunity means equalization of the length of the school term, of school facilities, and of good instruction for all children by properly qualified teachers. A specific example which indicates the inequality in educational opportunity, to those who advocate this interpretation, exists among the various regions of the United States. The South has one third of the country's children to educate, but it has only one sixth of the school revenues of the nation. Many educational leaders maintained, therefore, that the federal government should give aid from national revenues to all states on two bases :

9. Conant, James B., *The American High School Today*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1959; pp. 57—64.

(1) in proportion to the number of children to be educated in each state; and

(2) in proportion to the economic ability of each state to meet the costs of schools.¹⁰

By means of Federal aid allocated on these bases, inequality of educational opportunity among different regions will be decreased.

Among the various studies and writings of those who are interested in the issue of equality of opportunity, there's an interesting study by a social scientist named Natalie Rogoff. In the article on "Public Schools and Equality of Opportunity," Rogoff specified the idea of equality of educational opportunity by sketching three different patterns and possibilities of equality of opportunity in relation to ability, social class, and higher education. These patterns are:

A. The "Radical" Pattern

For centuries, men have dreamed of ideal societies wherein all persons of equal capacity would be treated alike, without

respect to their social origins. Equal ability would lead to equal rates of college-going, no matter what the social class background, and high ability would always lead to higher rates, no matter what the social class.

B. The "Moderate" Pattern.

A moderate set of views on equality of opportunity would go about as follows:

To strive for a set selection processes that puts every person in a social class according to his ability may be not only impossible, but perhaps not even desirable. Native ability is modified continuously by myriad social mechanisms. To overcome their force might lead to such disruptions of the social structure that, had we the knowledge, we might actually prefer not to pay so high a price. Within a given social class, the college-going rate is higher levels of ability. The rate is higher in more favored social classes at every ability level. In other words, social class position facilitates college going, independent of ability. Ability should have an effect equal or greater than that of social class position.

10. Gwynn, Minor J., *Curriculum Principles and Social Trends*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1960; pp. 41—42

C The "Conservative" Pattern

The stance of the conservative toward equality of opportunity is easily discerned from what have been said before. It is his position that in the long run, we delude ourselves if we believe that talent and ability observed among the lowest social classes should be taken seriously and encouraged. What really counts is the character of the social class into which the youngster was born. Society will be better off if it allocates opportunities according to social class and does not try to tinker with the biological and social reinforcing mechanisms that have worked well enough for centuries. This Pattern of opportunity would show no sensitivity to ability but would decrease at successively less favorable social class positions.¹¹

The criteria of equality of opportunity proposed by Rogoff are unlike those generally invoked by others interested in this problems. For, Rogoff advocated the concept that: **equality of opportunity refers to the way individuals are treated relative to another.**"

In conclusion, modern society is an increasingly complex social organization. Apart from seeking some other equalities such as economic, social, racial equality and so on, men, in addition, seek equality of opportunity for personal development. It is apparently true that greater educational opportunity make those equalities possible. In so far as it presses for still greater equalization of educational opportunity, it ensures the existence of continued pressures in the future for greater equalization of opportunity in economic, political, religious and social life. At the present time, there are debates or controversies over the interpretations of the meaning of the term "equality of educational opportunity." But these controversies, to me, just underline different emphases in theories and practices for improving the educational situation. For instance: one group emphasizes "individual ability" or "individual differences" while the others put more emphasis on school facilities and a desegregated school system. So equality of educational opportunity has produced on the one hand a "progressive" emphasis on the individual child and on the other a curriculum which ensures that every body will be treated the same. I hope these controversies will not be a hindrance for

11. Rogoff, Natalie, "Public Schools and Equality of Opportunity," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, (February, 1960), pp. 252—259

educational improvement. Instead, I hope they will cause a change in schools which leads to a greater equality of educational opportunity among the citizens of the nation regardless of social class, race, and economic status.

Reference

1. Beard, Charles A., *A charter of the Social Sciences in Schools - Part I*, American Historical Association, New York, 1952; pp. 64
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3. Counts, George S., *The Selective Character of American Education*, Chicago University Press, 1922; pp. 149
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