

This Week's Citation Classic

Coleman J S, Campbell E Q, Hobson C J, McPartland, J, Mood A M, Weinfeld F D & York R L. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health, Education & Welfare. Office of Education (OE-38001 and supp.), 1966. 548 p.

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"This research originated in a way that was more unusual in 1964 than it is now: It resulted from an explicit directive to the U.S. Commissioner of Education in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A section (402) of the Bill stated:

The Commissioner shall conduct a survey and make a report to the President and the Congress, within two years of the enactment of this title, concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion or national origin in public education institutions at all levels in the United States, its territories and possessions, and the District of Columbia.

"This was one of the first forays of Congress into mandating research related to policy. It was met with some confusion at the Office of Education, because that agency had not before gathered direct information from students or even schools, but only from school districts, primarily reports on school finances.

"However, the Commissioner, Francis Keppell, and the Assistant Commissioner for Educational Research, Alexander Mood, determined to break this pattern to meet the directive, and to obtain extensive information from students, teachers, and schools. Mood asked Ernest Campbell and me to co-direct the survey, to be carried out both in higher educational institutions and at the elementary and secondary level. The initial, and perhaps most critical, task was to determine the intent of Congress, to learn what Congress meant by lack of availability of equal educational opportunities, and what parties had interests in the information to be obtained. To do this, we examined the Congressional Record, and we interviewed representatives of various civil rights and minority groups. No single definition of equal educational opportunity emerged, but several, in two broad classes. One was equal opportunity as defined by the inputs to

education: facilities, teachers, materials, curriculum. A second was equal opportunity as defined by educational outputs: the growth in achievement in basic skills and acquisition of knowledge.

"A major reason for the later impact of the report was that it attempted to examine equality of educational opportunity in both of these ways. This had the effect of directing attention to the output definition, for most earlier research had limited itself to inputs as measures of inequality of educational opportunity.

"Data collection and data processing for the research was contracted to Educational Testing Service, which gathered data on about 800,000 public school students and smaller numbers of college students in the fall of 1965 and had the data ready for analysis by early spring of 1966. The analysis was carried out and the report written to meet the Congressional deadline of July 2, 1966.

"The report at first attracted little attention, primarily because it had no immediately apparent policy implications, and because its results were somewhat negative. It showed fewer inequalities of inputs for minorities than expected (smaller, for example, than regional or urban-rural, inequalities), and it showed that the traditional input measures of school quality were not strongly related to achievement of students.

"However, for primarily three reasons, the report subsequently gained attention. One was the very finding of lack of relation between traditional input measures and school achievement, a result which disturbed conventional wisdom, and generated a number of attempts at reanalysis to find such effects. A second was that one result of the research, showing that backgrounds of fellow-students in the school were related to achievement, came to be useful for, and used by, the growing push toward affirmative racial integration of the schools. Thus the report came to be used in school board deliberations, in court decisions, and by local educational administrators to aid in the argument for increasing school integration. A third reason was that the report was an early example of a new genre: social research on a large scale directed to issues of social policy. Thus it attracted attention among practitioners of social research both as an illustration of how such research may be done and as an illustration of various pitfalls of such research."