



History of Education Society (USA) Annual Meeting. History of Education Society,

Reviewed by Sara L. Schwebel

Published on H-Education (April, 2005)

As members of the U.S. History of Education Society (HES) gathered in Kansas City for their annual meeting this fall, they did so in both the anniversary year of U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board* and the immediate aftermath of the 2004 U.S. Presidential election. Unsurprisingly, discussion about the intertwining of politics and education animated a significant number of panel presentations and informal conference conversations. The roundtable discussion "*Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* from the Inside: The Participants Speak" attracted the largest crowd during the three-day presentation period. Judith Lynne McConnell (Washburn University) shared stories with the standing-room-only crowd that she and her Washburn undergraduates had gathered during the course of oral interviews with Brown plaintiff Linda Brown (age eight at the time of her court appearance) and Cheryl Brown Henderson (age three at the time of *Brown v. Board*), Executive Director of the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research. Both women, McConnell told the audience, emphasized that in Topeka, the central issue at stake in the 1950s had been access to schools, not equality of school facilities and instruction. As McConnell explained, the separate elementary schools for white and black children had been built by the same company, and high school students of all races and ethnicities already attended an integrated school. Moreover, the teachers in

the segregated black elementary schools collectively held more advanced degrees than did the teachers in the white elementary schools. Because many Topeka neighborhoods were integrated, however, black children often had to travel farther to attend the segregated school for black children than they would have if they were granted access to any elementary school. Mrs. Ruth Scales Everett, a child plaintiff in the first Brown case and a participant in the HES roundtable discussion, echoed Linda Brown's sentiments (as summarized by McConnell). In reference to her own personal experience attending a segregated elementary school, Everett remarked, "I don't regret any of it. Some people do, but I don't." The all-black school was located a mile and a half from her home while the all-white school was within easy walking distance. Everett, who admitted she remembers little about her childhood role in the court case that made her "famous," recalls only the close relationships she had with her African-American teachers and the familial atmosphere fostered by school faculty, staff, and student body. Mrs. Johnnie Sanders, a kindergarten teacher at a technology magnet school created in response to the "Brown III" decision (1992), provided a contemporary perspective on the Brown cases and their continued effect on Topeka schools. Sanders explained that the magnet elementary school in which she teaches was built to counteract the re-segregation of schools caused by the "open-enrollment" policy previously in effect. Nonetheless, the

magnet school has by default become a neighborhood school: the Hispanic children who live in the school's immediate neighborhood now constitute the largest population group (although the percentage of white, African-American, and Hispanic students are almost equal) and 87 percent of the students receive free or reduced-cost lunches. <p> High stakes testing, moreover, has made it difficult to emphasize technology, which was supposed to differentiate the school from other elementary schools. And, as audience members pointed out, high stakes testing and a shortage of Hispanic teachers have also prevented the school from devoting the kind of attention to cultural and ethnic history that was common to pre-1954 all-black elementary schools. Sanders's remarks, combined with the presentations of other panelists, sparked animated discussion about the successes and failures of the court cases collectively known as "Brown." <p> The roundtable discussion, a new addition as of the 2003 HES conference, highlights HES members' eagerness to place contemporary history and the history of the recent past in dialogue with the more traditional subjects of history of education scholarship. Attendees' participation in the roundtable discussion, in fact, suggested an interest in collecting even more testimonials from participants in the struggle for desegregation. In particular, there was desire for the kind of deeply informed oral histories that the panel participants, who were but children at the time of the historic events, could not always provide. <p> Like the roundtable discussion, a number of conference presentations focused on the meeting of politics and education. "Issues in Teaching and Curriculum: Three Case Studies," "New Perspectives on the Politics of Education," and "Race, Culture, and Assimilation in the Schools" all probed the intersection of school curriculum, political context, and educational policy. And, despite its catchall title, the panel "Visions of Education" offered three intriguing glimpses into the way teachers, schools, and an educational movement responded to the demands

of particular historical and political moments. In her paper "Constructions of Americanism, Patriotism and Dissent: Quaker Independent Schools during the Second World War," Diana C. D'Amico (New York University) argued that Friends succeed in expressing a voice of dissent by their strong adherence to a traditional liberal arts curriculum and extracurricular emphasis on leadership. In their paper "Americanizing Montessori: Historical Perspectives on the Montessori Method in the United States," Keith Whitescarver (The College of William and Mary) and Jacqueline Cossentino (University of Maryland) traced the development and positioning of the Montessori movement across distinct historical and political moments in the United States. Finally, in her paper "'To Pilot Without Rowing': Julia Anne King and the History of Teaching History, 1869-1915," Laura Docter Thornburg (Michigan State University) explored the innovative ideas of a little-known female Normal School teacher, ideas that prefigured those of John Dewey. <p> The 2004 HES Outstanding Book Award session complemented well the theme of educational and political interaction. Although not as well attended as the roundtable discussion, the presentation by Jane H. Hunter (Lewis and Clark College) was certainly a highlight of the conference. While introducing her award-winning <cite>How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood</cite> (2002), Hunter said that she began her research project--an effort to understand the origins of a prolonged period of youth beginning in Victorian America--without intending to focus on girls' attendance at schools. She then discovered, during the course of nearly two decades of research, that her story was in fact rooted in schools. Hunter's presentation thus inverted one of the themes emerging in many different places during the conference. In Hunter's story, education in fact prefigured political change. Before there could be a "New Woman" who helped usher in suffrage, for example, there had to be a "New Girl." This new girl, Hunter argues, emerged not

only within the unique environment of nineteenth-century public schools and private academies, but also in the outdoor streets and commercial spaces that the girls had the tacit right to traverse. <p> Hunter cheered for her Victorian schoolgirls who strived for recognition and honors in their academically rigorous classrooms. So, too, did the senior scholars at the HES conference applaud the graduate students in attendance. A major focus of this year's Annual Meeting involved ensuring that graduate students obtained the welcome, intellectual support, and social networking opportunities they needed. The "Lunch with the [Past and Current HES] Presidents" brought graduate students and leading scholars together for informal conversation over a catered luncheon. After graduate students chatted with one of several past presidents during their meal, each spoke about their academic and intellectual journey within the history of education field. As was the case at its inaugural meeting last year, the lunch received high reviews from graduate student attendees, and the personal stories told by the presidents generated considerable laughter. <p> Graduate students again gathered for a complimentary lunch on Saturday, this time with HES President Linda Eisenmann. Eisenmann spoke about her commitment to graduate students and her particular desire that the "un-shepherded" participants, those who had come without a mentor, felt welcomed into the Society. Eisenmann asked what additional steps HES could take to make the Society and its Annual Meeting open, accessible, and useful to its graduate student members. The formation of a graduate student committee was proposed to investigate and act upon recommendations. <p> Given that one-third of this year's conference attendees and a high percentage of presenters were doctoral students, the Society's concern is well-founded. But most graduate students agreed that the Society was already doing a good job in meeting their needs. Discussants for panels containing graduate student presenters, for example, offered particularly detailed

feedback and criticism tempered with encouragement and praise. <p> As David Labaree's preview of the Kansas City conference in AERA's Division F newsletter <cite>The Network</cite> reported, the acceptance rate for papers at this HES conference was 70 percent, for whole sessions 79 percent.[1] As is common in such conferences, the quality and freshness of panel presentations varied considerably, with some much stronger on description than analysis. Nonetheless, most panels generated a lively exchange between presenter and audience, as did the conference as a whole. In thinking about the 2004 Annual Meeting, I am struck by the way presenter-audience dialogue, discussant-presenter criticism, and senior scholar-graduate student exchange created a comfortable place to test ideas. It certainly motivated many to return to research projects with renewed enthusiasm and anticipation for the 2005 Annual Meeting to be held in Baltimore from October 20 to 23, 2005.[2] <p> Notes <p> [1]. <cite>The Network</cite> 19, no. 2 (2004): p. 3; [http://aera.net/uploadedFiles/Divisions/History](http://aera.net/uploadedFiles/Divisions/History/cite>and/cite>Historiography(F)/Newsletters/ Fall 2004.pdf)<cite>and</cite> <cite>Historiography(F)/Newsletters/ Fall 2004.pdf. <p> [2]. See details under [http://academics.sru.edu/history](http://academics.sru.edu/historyof/cite>edquarterly/cfp.htm)<cite>of</cite>edquarterly/cfp.htm <p> Copyright (c) 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu. <p>

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-education>

Citation: Sara L. Schwebel. Review of *History of Education Society (USA) Annual Meeting*. H-Education, H-Net Reviews. April, 2005.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=15466>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.