

## **The States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project: New Perspectives on Research and the Historical Record**

### ***Transcript of: Welcome, Opening, and Orientation to the States Impact on Federal Education Policy Project***

**Gordon Ambach:** This is a little story for the archivists in particular. A friend of mine was leaving an apartment and therefore clearing out his furniture. He came to a bureau, looked in the top drawer of the bureau, and lo and behold there was a ticket from the shoe repair shop. He noticed on the ticket that it was ten years old. It had been saved. He decided he would play a trick on the shoe repair shop, so he took the ticket in to him and he handed it across the counter and said, "Could I have my shoes please?" Well, the shoe repair guy took the ticket and went into the back room, and he came back out about two minutes later and he said, "They'll be ready next Tuesday." The power of saving materials and making them useful.

We are delighted to welcome you to this conference on States' Impact on Federal Education Policy. Many of you were with us last evening and we got a chance to get acquainted and to get thinking about the subject. We are so pleased that you made the commitment to be with us for this session today.

For several years now, a small group of advisers, together with our colleagues at the State Archives in New York, have been thinking about this subject - thinking about what kind of research should be done, what kind of archival work needs to be done, and of course, most important, what is the purpose of it all in the first instance, to try to help inform future directions of the design of education federalism.

This conference is really an extension of the kind of activity that the advisors have been undertaking, which has been a process of thinking about the issues and trying to see whether we could contribute in some way to increasing the attention of our country, and particularly of our policymakers, on the critical issues of designing education federalism. Now, I have provided for you in advance by email, and it's also in your black packets, a text which is an introduction to this conference. We put it out in advance so that we would not have to take the time of going through the detailed level that is there, and so that it would provide you with the kind of advance notice of what our perspective is on this subject. If you didn't see it or read it in the email form, there is a copy of the introduction, which is in your packet.

While I am making some brief, "get going" comments here this morning, read on if you haven't had a chance to look at it, or read a second time. It's better the second time that you read it. So try it again if you didn't get to it the first time, while I make just a few points about why we are here and what we hope to accomplish.

Our objectives have been stated over and over again in all the advance materials for this particular conference, and I just noted them. It is to promote the collection of resource materials through archiving, so that they are genuinely accessible, particularly materials about states and

states' impacts. Secondly, to try to help promote the development of a research agenda and encourage more persons to be involved with research about the federalism issues. Thirdly, and perhaps it should go round first, is to generally raise the awareness among policymakers of what the value of such work could be for them.

Our perspective is from that of the states and the states' impact. As you well know, most of the research that gets done on federal programs and the states and the localities focuses on the direction of the federal government impact on the states and localities. There is not that much that really focuses on what the states' intentions, what the states' actions have been, and as partners in trying to develop the federal policies, either through advocacy or through the examples of their programs, or through the implementation strategies. We believe that it is important to try to get that focus so that that perspective could be linked with other research as we are attempting to inform what is the most effective kind of way to be able to put together the design of education federalism.

Now just a word about the design of education federalism. We are talking here primarily about the institutional arrangements – the relative responsibilities among the three levels of government. And that is elaborated in the document. I won't add more about that at this particular point.

A word or two about why this topic is so important now. We are in the city where “No Child Left Behind” reauthorization, ESEA authorization, has been bubbling along for quite a while. And it's on everybody's mind to a certain extent. And, of course, pivotal to that reauthorization are issues of federalism. What levels of responsibility should be assigned to the different levels of government? We did not start this project with the intention that the focus was solely on ESEA. We are looking across the board at different forms of federalism and different kinds of acts. But the heightened interest right now in ESEA “No Child Left Behind” reauthorization seems to me gives a particular boost to this topic.

For those of us who have been around this business for fifty years, and there are several in the room who have been in it for that long, we have seen a tremendous change in relative responsibility of roles among the levels of government over this period, and through a whole variety of different acts. The tendency has been in the country for greater nationalization of problem solving. This is part of our global picture – the economy, security issues, environmental issues, you name it, telecommunications. Everything is pushing us in the direction for more national solutions. This is not a project which is anti-national. This is not a project which is anti-federal. This is a project which is given the fact that this increase in national solutions is probably going to continue. The question is how do you make national or nation-wide decisions in a federal system which much more effectively employs the capacities and the resources at the different levels of government? That is why we are here to take up this topic in a particular way.

We have had this wonderful group of advisors who have been helping us with the project. They are all named in the materials, and with forgiveness on their part I will not rename them now. We will do that a little bit later in the conference. They have provided splendid help in designing the way we would approach the topic, and many of them are here in prominent roles for this conference. We appreciate so much our presenters and discussants who are with us for the three

sessions. We appreciate very much having with us a special group of about thirteen doctoral or post-doctoral candidates who are from seven different universities around the country and they are here with the good generosity of the Spencer Foundation, who provided transportation for them to be with us. We are very pleased for the assistance of our table discussion leaders, but most of all we appreciate what everybody is doing by way of committing some time here.

We have four sessions through the day. These three sessions to start with present different approaches to a research agenda; the first one on the overall changing nature of federalism and a way to analyze that, the second one dealing with a more specific theme, if you will, of standards-based reform as a case study, and the third one on the education of children who are disabled. Through those three frames or sessions [we hope] to draw out from you your own ideas about whether these are the right kinds of topics, whether we should change them; your own ideas about how we can encourage both the archiving and the research components.

One concluding comment about our last session. When we planned this session we figured that ESEA would have been reauthorized already. We were planning this a year ago and that was a pretty reasonable prospect. Obviously it is not. We know that through this day there will be lots of points made about how this discussion of federalism has an impact, or might have an impact on that reauthorization. We want to capture those points while you are at your discussion tables and we've set a concluding session this afternoon as an opportunity for some of us who are the advisors or moderators to kind of sense: What are the key questions? What are the key recommendations? [We will] bring them back with a little bit of synthesis in the afternoon and then have further discussion from the floor on those points.

The project never set out to make a recommendation or set of proposals on ESEA reauthorization and we are not going to do this following this conference. So we are not trying to drive for any consensus. We are trying to solicit ideas and concepts about federalism that might inform that.

Well thank you very kindly for joining us and for the chance for me to give you just a little bit of an oral orientation. The key partners in this whole program are at the State Archives in New York State. We started the project with money from the Wallace Foundation and went to the Archives because it was so important that we be anchored in where the base materials would be, not just for the next reauthorization but for time after time, after time, to capture a record of perhaps some fifty years.

It is my privilege to present to you the Director of Operations at the State Archives and the director of this project, Kathleen Roe.

**Kathleen Roe:** Thank you. I want to welcome all of you on behalf of my department, the New York State Education Department (we are an unusual archives in that we are in a State Education Department, and by our feeling it is a very happy placement); our Commissioner, Richard Mills; my Deputy Commissioner, Jeffrey Cannell; and as you can tell I am not Christine Ward. If you know Chris you know there's a big difference. She is very elegant and I am just me. Sorry, but Chris had an unfortunate fire in her home last week and could not come. She is right now trashing out the second floor of her home and sends her regards, but I am stepping in for her.

A number of people have said to me during the course of last evening and in past discussions, “Why would the State Archives or any archival institution get involved in this project? What are you doing there?” Some of the people said, “Why you? Why would you be there?” Not me personally, although they might have said that also. [laughter] There are really three primary reasons, and underlying much of this conference there is, from our perspective, a very important archival goal going on while you are talking about policy. There is an archival piece through all of this.

The first reason we have been involved in this project, and we were very welcoming to it when the idea first arose from my Commissioner. He is my old Commissioner so I still call him Commissioner Ambach, although I am trying not to do that. He said not to, but sometimes we slip. Anyway, what we are trying to do, what we try to conceive of in this project is to ensure that a full historical record survives to document this very important issue of education policy.

When we looked at our own holdings in the State Archives, when we looked through databases and all kinds of resources nationally, in many areas, unfortunately, there are gaps in the historical record. This is one of those areas. You might not think so, but the truth is it is kind of eclectic and peculiar what has survived or not survived relating to education policy. Those gaps are really important that we fill. One of the other things that kind of drives our documentation issue is that many people think that archives are old stuff. If you say “archives” people envision the Declaration of Independence, the “ooh” and “ahh” documents, the old stuff. Very few of us even like the idea that anything post 1950 is archival or historical but I am here to tell you as a gray haired woman that it is true, it is archival, and it is historical. Some of you have been part of that. Some of you are observing that. But the post-World War II period is historical and we really need to save that record. There is, as I said, a real limitation in what is out there in the fullness of the record.

We have done some work in this project, in the archival component of it, to try and look at that, and if you check out our website we have tried to identify what is out there on education policy. Take a look at it and you will see exactly what I am telling you. The gaps are there and we need to fill those gaps. It is important for us to ensure that that record is full and that is really a primary motivator for us.

The second concern for us as archivists is that not only should the records survive, but someone has to be able to find them. In particular, I am interested in some of our Spencer fellows who have to try and find that stuff, or people like Carl Kaestle who have been researching for years – trying to find that stuff and use it.

Frankly, federal and state agencies alone, not including other organizations, are producing staggering amounts of information in paper, and particularly now in electronic records form. Only two to three percent of that actually ever comes to an archives. Somebody has to decide what is important and somebody has to see it survives.

The National Archives itself has five billion modern paper records, that is post-war period, and they are all stored in thirty buildings around the country. My own institution has over a hundred million modern paper records, a hundred million items. That is a stunning amount, and that is

one state and one country. It is further complicated by the increasing amount of electronic information that is out there. So, any researcher in education policy is faced with about literally thousands of boxes, tens to hundreds of thousands of folders and incredible numbers of bytes and gigabytes – and all the way through those other bytes – of information to try and deal with.

How do we as archivists capture that information and provide it to you as researchers, and make it accessible in any kind of a way that is humanly possible to conceive of or work with? That is our second challenge. We have been trying to do that with some of the records we have been describing in New York – trying to model a method for bringing out the important subjects, which the advisors have been helpful in getting us to, and then making it accessible. So there is another area that we want to explore and hear from you about in the future.

The third reason that we are doing this project is that archival work is not just about handling things from the past. We don't sit quietly in our repositories and wait for somebody to dump things on us, or at least some of us don't. What we are trying to do with this project is to raise awareness, and probably every one of you knows of some stash of records that are out there that really need to be preserved. If agencies and organizations and individuals really don't think about preserving records, it won't happen. Things will get thrown out, things will get lost along the way.

Our project has really focused on raising some awareness. Our staff have talked with some of the major national education organizations, with state agencies, with research- and issues-oriented groups to try and discuss with them moving their records into archival repositories, and not New York's. I am not out to create the education policy archives of the world. I am just here to take care of New York, because that is what the Governor said we should do and I will do what my Governor said. Our mandate is New York, but we know that those records are too important and you can't understand New York's without the whole context. So what we are trying to do is match up repositories and records holders. We know our colleagues, we know where you can go with your records, and what we are trying to do is encourage those records to be taken into an institution somewhere that is responsible and appropriate. So that is a big part of what we are doing.

Our hope for this conference during the rest of the day is that as you discuss the issues in each session, you'll make notes to yourself and pass them on to us. In your folder there is a sheet where you can make notes about research ideas you think would be useful, particularly about archival collections and collections of records that you believe are out there, that perhaps we can use that information to connect people and repositories together to help further preserve the record. So please take advantage of that sheet. We would really appreciate it. And please keep that as the subtext through your conversations.

We look forward to this day's discussion and we found that it has been a wonderful way for us to learn about education policy. My own research was in history of the Depression and I love being depressed. [laughs] So it was a great experience for me, but to learn about other people's fields of study is extremely important. The only way archivists can know what is best to keep is by knowing what is of importance to researchers and to the study of this area. So we look to you,

and we appreciate your input, and we are delighted to have you here. Please feel free to contact any of us during the conference. Thank you.