

Sociology in the Curriculum

Goals and present status

SOCIOLOGY is a scientific discipline which focuses upon human groupings, their intricate systems of relationships, and the behavioral patterns that occur in the midst of social systems. Of course, like many definitions, this one may be found wanting by professional sociologists who are engaged in healthy academic exchanges concerning the nature of sociology, its goals, its procedures, and its appropriate place in intellectual inquiry.¹

There are persons who view sociology as capable of bringing a constructive perspective to bear upon a wide variety of social problems. For others, sociology is essentially one of the social sciences which seeks constantly to refine its methods and findings concerning human interaction. Sociology's practical applications, from the latter point of view, are outside the province of sociologists, but remain the appropriate responsibility of all persons. Obviously, this dichotomy is a matter of legitimate emphasis and occurs also in other fields in which there are pressures for immediate solutions to so-

cial difficulties or in which there is stress as well as insistence upon cautious, slow, painstaking investigation and analysis or basic or fundamental research unhurried by extraneous or disconcerting demands.

Educators, however, are conscious of the steady march of oncoming generations, who will live under societal conditions not of their own making, but who will, nevertheless, be affected by these conditions. Because these generations will, in turn, affect social circumstances, there must be thoughtful appraisal of curriculum content.

There has been a long-standing dictum that school systems should not divorce themselves from current trends and changes in the society which activates them. In the past, the social upheavals of waves of immigrants entering an almost totally new world, the distress stemming from the deepening Depression of the thirties, and the impacts of global wars provoked a reexamination of educational content. In coping with the ramifications brought about by the acceleration of social changes in more recent times, educational leadership again is challenged.

¹For a brief and stimulating discussion of the nature of sociology, see *What Is Sociology?*, by Alex Inkeles, Foundations of Modern Sociology Series, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964.

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To name only a few matters of momentous significance, educators need to weigh carefully the civil rights movement, adult and juvenile crime, urban development and renewal, the proliferation and appeal of mass media, family disorganization, discovery of new sources of energy, mental health, challenges from foreign regimes and technology, emerging nations, vocational guidance in an age of specialization, greater visibility of the aged, pockets of poverty, and school "dropouts." Every social science, including sociology, offers useful data and insights about these phenomena and should not be discarded, neglected, or overlooked.

A New Threshold

There are numerous "straws in the wind" which indicate that sociology is on the threshold of taking its place among its sister social sciences in the curriculum of the nation's schools. Sociology originated as a formal discipline at the highest graduate levels in colleges and universities, and it has rapidly spread to undergraduate courses. In 1962, the U.S. Office of Education reported that 8,183 bachelor degrees in sociology were awarded by over 640 colleges and universities. The entry of sociology into secondary schools is evident in the U.S. Office of Education report for 1960-1961, which noted that approximately 290,000 students were enrolled in sociology or social problems courses. Out of the 22,833 high schools in the United States, 4,461 offered courses in sociology or social problems.

Sociology is chiefly offered at the eleventh and twelfth grade levels, with a preference for the twelfth grade. Approximately 17 percent of twelfth grade students were studying sociology in 1960-1961. There seems to be a further pref-

erence for sociology to be taught as a half-year course. About 178 thousand students studied sociology as a half-year or semester course, whereas the remaining 112 thousand studied sociology for a full academic year. The largest enrollments in the half-year course in sociology were found in California, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and North Carolina.

At the elementary level, sociology is rarely identified as a separate and distinct field, but is incorporated into the study of history, geography, and citizenship. Yet, under the "expanding environment" theme, elementary schools are, indeed, drawing upon sociological data and theory as they examine family life, the local community, the region, the nation, and international affairs. If it is true that social ferment requires the utilization of the best intellectual resources available, then the earliest grounding in fundamentals is needed. Far too often, elementary exposure to selected, traditional or favored areas of study has led to the neglect of those fields which have remained unexplored territory when mature choices are made. Every citizen draws upon his grasp of societal knowledge and the harvest of neglect is reaped by everyone.

Need for Sociology

While students must be treated in harmony with their respective capacities, there is little doubt that the goal of dealing with social complexities calls for a graduated preparatory program starting at the elementary grades and moving through the secondary schools. By this preparatory work, much wasteful "un-learning" at higher educational levels can be minimized and entry into colleges and universities can truly become "higher" education. Basic sociological

concepts such as status, role, prediction, categories, social stratification, objectivity, and norms become familiar analytical tools instead of strange, useless jargon to the uninitiated. If an illustrative parallel might be cited, the current conditions in sociological instruction in many, but not all, school systems, would be similar to attempting to teach trigonometry and calculus without first grounding students in basic numbers.

The American Sociological Association has taken note of the need for a legitimate place for sociology in the curriculum of secondary schools. Supported initially by a grant from the course content improvement section of the National Science Foundation and led by a selected American Sociological Association committee, a Center for Sociological Resources for Secondary Schools was established in the summer of 1964 at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire. A series of materials is being developed for use in the senior high school sociology course consisting of major units developed from the sociological perspective. A second series of materials will consist of self-contained units designed by teams of sociologists and social studies teachers for supplementary use in other secondary school social studies courses. Both series should be available by September 1965 for classroom trial.

In similar fashion, the Society for the Study of Social Problems has created a division dealing with sociology instruction in the schools. One can predict that this work, too, will result in increased liaison between sociologists at the university level and social studies instructors at the secondary and elementary levels.

The development of sociology in the curricula of the nation's schools rests

solidly upon interested lay and professional leadership. Both texts and teachers are in short supply. Currently, there are relatively few teachers either grounding themselves in sociology or including sociology in their preparation for teaching. Alert schools of education are, of course, remedying this situation. Only three textbooks are currently on the market in high school sociology. A fourth text will be published this academic year and will utilize the teamwork of a university professor and a concerned high school instructor.²

Finally, it should be noted that, in the midst of the general upgrading of all curriculum content, many secondary schools throughout the country are raising the required number of Carnegie units in the social sciences and social studies for graduation. This trend mirrors our need for the best possible use of our educational resources in the face of the social ferment in our times.

References

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² These texts are: *Social Living*, Third Edition, Paul H. Landis, Boston: Ginn and Company, 1958; *High School Sociology*, William E. Cole and Charles S. Montgomery, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1959; and *Living in Social Groups*, James A. Quinn, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1962. The new text will be *Modern Sociology*, Marvin R. Koller and Harold C. Course, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

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