RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENT
IN EDUCATION

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I cannot claim to be a professional sociologist; rather I am a student of education, led to sociology in an attempt to find solutions to a number of educational problems. It seems better, therefore, not to attempt to survey the field of sociology, to describe and appraise the various areas being actively cultivated by research workers and then to try to point their relevance, but rather to lay before you a pattern of educational problems and then to look for help to sociology.

This procedure has disadvantages. It is somewhat personal, and if your interests do not coincide with mine, I run the risk of boring you. It is selective: more calculated, therefore, to whet the appetite than to satisfy it. Worst of all, I am looking at sociology from the vantage point of education, and the professional sociologist might well disapprove of this.

On the other hand, there are advantages. Approaching sociology through educational problems should keep its relevance to education firmly and persistently in the foreground. Best of all, it should allow me to explore a line of argument rather than to undertake an objective survey; and as an educationist rather than a sociologist, it better befits me to try to stimulate than to undertake to inform.

Let me put to you as a starting point, then, a proposition. Broadly speaking, the older our children grow, the less happy are we educationists about their education. We are rampant in the infant room, we are influential in the junior school, but in the secondary modern school we are on the retreat, to the grammar school we have contributed little, and in the universities we are not even considered relevant.

Let me further ask you to grant me as a hypothesis that this is related to the fact that the growing individual becomes more and more a social and cultural being, that educational problems at the secondary stage become more and more complicated by social factors.

But just what are the principal educational problems at the secondary stage? I do not want to argue this point, so I must turn for a statement of them, not to a prophet crying in the wilderness ahead of his generation, but to the reasonably orthodox and - on this point at least - acceptable Advisory Council on Education. In the Crowther Report the problems seem to emerge as the difficulty of holding in double harness both vocational and general education and the difficulty of relating general education sufficiently closely to life.

This seems a fair picture of the educational situation. Certainly, these problems are widely discussed; and one can, moreover, see that they become more difficult as the age of the pupil increases. Learning to read is - or can be - both vocational and general and its relevance to life is not hard to establish. The study of mechanics or of Homer or of the causes of the French Revolution is more difficult to justify in any of these terms.

Let us then, try to use this problem, which I have suggested is socially based, as a probe with which to explore sociology.

I believe we meet certain difficulties at the outset because of an uncertainty about the meaning of the terms, vocational and general, as applied to education. And sociology can, I think help us here.

If we accept from the sociologist the proposition that it is a function of education to transmit culture, then we may use the whole background of research and of refinement of concepts which can be found in cultural sociology.

The classic definition of culture is E.B. Tylor's, dating from 1871. "Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." The concept has been considerably refined by the work of ninety years, but this will still stand as a broad statement. The most important points to make are that culture is learnt by individuals, and that it is, at the same time, a function of social life, of the group. One might, therefore, say that when we teach, we establish individuals in a relationship to groups.

Now, sociologists have developed a complex analysis of culture. To gain access to this in useful form, it is not necessary to delve into research articles: a great deal of the work has already been embodied in general texts. And it is fair to say that in this analysis three areas are of most importance for education: the relation of culture to social groups, the
dynamics of culture within a group, and the analysis of the content of culture.

Let us first look at the relation of culture to groups. At the simplest level, we may think of a small, preliterate society as possessing a homogeneous culture. There are limitations to this view, but it will serve to point the contrast that in our own society there are thousands of groups with distinguishable cultural identities. Culture is not common, but differentiated. For example, the medical profession, the middle class, the boy scout movement, even perhaps a family, can each be regarded as a group possessing "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and ... other capabilities and habits" which can be transmitted to new members who are inducted into the group. And any member of our society is a participant in many groups of this kind.

A simple way of describing the situation is to say, rather crudely, that culture is the common knowledge and understanding possessed by a group. It is then important to realise that people are only enabled to communicate with one another - and, indeed, to reflect upon their own situations - by virtue of common understandings, common culture. In this sense, culture is the medium of our intellectual and emotional lives. Hence the problem of numeracy and literacy, of scientific and humanistic cultures and the difficulty of communication between them.

The sociologist's account of the dynamics of culture within groups is broadly as follows. The group generates an expectation about how people will behave and understand. And it enforces this expectation by sanctions, that is, rewards or punishments. In this way, the group provides a medium in which behaviour can be predicted and understanding assumed. The group represented by "the consensus of informed opinion on literary matters" expects Shakespeare to be valued above Agatha Christie. A seriously intended reversal of this rating attracts sanctions: criticism or exclusion from the group. A good winemaker is rewarded by the admiration and esteem of his associates, a woman who conforms to accepted standards of beauty by lightly shading her eyes or extending her neck with brass rings is rewarded by male approval and female envy. A lady who offends against the rules of etiquette is struck out of the address book, a blackleg is sent to Coventry. A common code of behaviour and a common understanding is achieved. Certain things become normal in that group; and the commonly understood and expected standards are called "norms".

The analysis of the content of culture becomes a classification of these norms. Thus, the sociologist distinguishes, for example, language norms which define the meaning of symbols, and the accents of speech, technical norms which define the accepted best ways of tackling a job, folkways - roughly equivalent to customs and etiquette, mores - moral standards, roles, which define the group's understanding of the individual in terms of what is expected of him ... and so on. The ultimate norms are values, the acceptable ends and purposes of behaviour. On them all other norms are articulated.

Now, let us return to our educational problem. It appears that in our complex society with its developed division of labour certain groups specialise in tending and transmitting certain elements in our culture. The medical profession transmits the knowledge of healing, plumbers transmit the knowledge of plumbing, classical scholars transmit a knowledge of Latin and Greek; and such groups are sources of standards or norms in their own fields. I think it is better to place all these activities in the category "specialist" rather than the category "vocational". We may then say that it is part of the function of education to sustain groups of this sort and that this function may be called specialist education.

Specialist education, however, produces a social difficulty. We equip doctors to develop medicine, plumbers to develop plumbing, classicists to develop classical studies. They have common understandings and standards in these areas, but they are restricted areas, and there are still very many areas of human existence where we are not prepared to delegate cultural transmission to experts. Morals, for example. We are not content - and I am on a very well-trodden path here - to leave morals to moral philosophers. We are far from complacent when a classicist who is sleeping with another man's wife returns us to the moral philosopher for our moral examples. Clearly, we need a general education covering not only morals, but the whole range of decisions we cannot delegate.

Now, such a general education cannot be regarded simply as a training. It is concerned with the common problems of human life; and with bombs hanging over our heads and prophets of moral decay in our midst, we must try to evoke creative responses to problems, not habitual responses trained in us as if we were performing animals. It appears that
each of us needs a general culture rich enough in its common understandings and concepts to allow us to discuss and reflect upon the everyday business of living. I do not think that this implies that we need a "common culture" shared by all. It does mean that each person should by his education be given access to one culture, or universe of discourse, adequate to sustain reflection and discussion at a creative level.

Now, we may take stock of our progress. Our excursion into cultural sociology has not solved any problems, but it has recast some old and thorny problems in what, I venture to suggest, are helpful ways.

First, it has yielded a distinction between specialist and general education. Specialist education norms a universe of discourse capable of refined operation over a narrow field; general education norms a universe of discourse suited to dealing with the ordinary contingencies of living.

Second, cultural sociology, considered in this light, provides a much better basis for curriculum analysis than we can find in the idea of general education as broad education, liberal education or education for citizenship. We can ask what efficacy educational experiences have in building a usable universe of discourse, what kind of literature, history or science enriches the general discussions of our pupils.

Third, we have highlighted the importance of standards or norms, which we see as fundamental to culture and as most effectively generated and sustained in a group. If we look outside the school for standards, we ask: are the professional standards of specialist groups — those generated in universities, laboratories, art schools, conservatories — a sound basis for general education? are certain general standards, for example those normed in the public school group, appropriate for people who have to grapple with widely divergent problems in living? and when a pupil leaves school, is it important that he should have access to some group which will support him in keeping his school standards in useful shape? If we look inside the school, we find ourselves at the heart of the debate between traditional and progressive educationists: should the teacher present standards to his class and try to induce them to norm them, or should he rather stimulate them to generate their own norms and standards and try to feed their development within the group? Our answer to these questions depends in no small measure on our knowledge of the process of norming in small groups and of its consequences and significances.

I have been trying to say that though there has so far been comparatively little educational application, sociologists are beginning to develop the conceptual basis of an approach to the problem of how one tends and transmits a living culture, a problem which Arnold Toynbee has admirably posed:

One consequence [of the introduction of formal education] is to make education become a burden on the mind. In the act of making it formal we make it cumulative. The successive cultural achievements of successive generations are recorded and handed on, while the capacity of a single human mind in a single lifetime remains within constant natural limits. How is a limited human mind to cope with a cultural heritage that is perpetually increasing in bulk? This problem is aggravated when people begin deliberately to extend the range of human knowledge by systematic research. There will be a temptation to try to facilitate the acquisition of the growing heritage by simplifying its content at the cost of impoverishing it. For educational purposes the culture may be reduced to a conventional form in which it will tend to become impersonal, secular and abstract; and in this process the living essence of the culture may slip out of the meshes of the educational net. The apprenticeship for life may be ousted by a course of instruction set by syllabus. Ordeals that are initiations into successive stages of life may shiver into examinations in arbitrarily selected bodies of cut and dried knowledge. What is the remedy for such an ailment? Am I right in thinking that sociology can help us in our attempt to find a principle by which we can select living from inert culture?

So much, then, for the concept of education as transmission of culture; but sociologists distinguish a second important function of education. We have already noted that our schools not only transmit culture, but also differentiate it. The education of a doctor not only places him in the group, medical profession; it also sets him apart from the group, plumbers. Education splits society up into groups as well as giving each group a unity within itself. These various groups interlock functionally and are elements in the social structure. They
also have different degrees of status and of the attributes, such as income and respect, which are reflections of status. Because of these differences of status, groups can be subsumed for some purposes under social classes. But social classes are not created exclusively by education. Birth, wealth, religious or political activity, can influence the class structure of a society. The relationship between social class and education is reciprocal. On the one hand, education is a source of social mobility, a determinant of social class; on the other, different educational opportunities are offered to people of different social classes and education is thus a reflection of social class. The problems raised by this reciprocal relationship between social structure and education are classic problems, already formulated in Plato's *Republic*.

Students of general sociology are naturally deeply interested in social class and social mobility, and in this particular field they have been reasonably ready to recognise the importance of education for general sociological theory. This "structural" sociology in both its static and dynamic approaches is much more highly developed than cultural sociology, and it is not necessary for me to spend a great deal of time pointing relevances which are obvious, and trying to build a pattern in a field of study which is well articulated in accessible literature. Anyone approaching the problems of social class through sociology will find himself embarrassed by the sheer volume of relevant work. One can scarcely do more than mention as the most useful introduction the fundamental reader, *Class, Status and Power*, edited by Bendix and Lipset.

When we move into the more specialised educational field, we do well to notice that, while the problem of culture centres on teaching, the problem of social class as a factor in education centres upon educational policy as realised in the structure of the educational system, and in its relation to the economic system. It would be wrong to suggest that this is a clear distinction; it is simply a question of emphasis. In discussing the sociology of culture in relation to education, we are primarily concerned with the quality of the educational experience: in discussing the relation of social class to education, we are concerned with opportunity, with access to education, with what the sociologist sometimes calls, "life chances". The issue of selection looms large, and we are concerned both with selection by examination and with selection by direct economic pressures. On the one hand, there are studies which explore the disadvantages in examination which limit the life chances of working class children; on the other, there are studies which investigate the influence of social and economic pressures on early leaving and similar "voluntary" selective processes. Interestingly enough, in our competitive society, more moral fervour is aroused by problems of opportunity than by problems concerning the content of education such as were discussed earlier.

Studies relating educational opportunity to social class certainly exist in all the English speaking countries, France, Germany, Sweden and Norway, and one suspects that they must have been carried out in most non-communist countries. Generally, they are soundly, and often brilliantly, executed, partly because of the strong supporting background in general sociology, partly because the clear general relevance implied by this background has attracted well equipped professional sociologists who are interested in education. *Social Class and Educational Opportunities* by Flood, Halsey and Martin is an excellent English treatment of the problem which has a special interest for teachers in this area because Middlesbrough was selected for study. D. V. Glass's *Social Mobility in Britain* supplies a general background, *Ruth Glass's Social Background of a Plant: a Survey of Middlesbrough*, a detailed and particular foreground. In the present context, one might also mention *Parity and Prestige in English Education* by Olive Banks, and an interesting study by Dr. F. Murgrove of Leicester which among other things, explores the general climate of opinion of parents towards the junior school and the expectations they hold about the opportunities it should offer. The Advisory Council's study of *Early Leaving* covers another aspect of the problem.

There is probably no further need to emphasise the importance and relevance of this body of work: there are few who are not concerned about the problems of selection in our educational system.

Just because of this concern, however, it should be emphatically pointed out that sociology can only serve to clarify the situation. The choice of policy remains a moral responsibility. However, even special pleading, like that of Michael Young's *Rise of the Meritocracy*, can gain in interest from a sociological foundation.
I have tried to distinguish two groups of educational decisions underlying the arguments about the balance of specialist and general education. One group of decisions refers to the content of education in the classroom. Here the issues are primarily pedagogical, and I argue that they can be clarified - though not decided - by further research based on cultural sociology. The other group of decisions refers to the differentiation of education in society between specialist groups and social classes. Here the issues are primarily social and can be clarified by research into social structure in relation to education. The distinction between these two areas can be demolished, if one thinks about them closely, and a theoretical synthesis can be achieved.

A third type of decision, which involves less of value judgement, depends on a prediction of economic and demographic trends. Here again sociology has a bearing, which we have not at this moment time to explore. The Crowther Report and John Vaizey's Costs of Education might be cited as introductions to the sorts of issue at stake.

These three areas of decision seem to me to define the central relevance of sociology to education. And I have concentrated on the first two because the decisions there appear to challenge the teacher as well as the administrator.

It remains to place the problems raised in a firmer context. They are what may be called "middle order problems", which need to be founded on an understanding of detailed processes and set against the background of a much fuller examination of the relation of education to society as a whole. Dr. A. H. Halsey has distinguished between a micro-sociology and a macro-sociology and it will help us to adopt his distinction.

We take the essential function of education to be that of the transmission (including preservation and innovation) of culture and we see the sociology of education as generated by the special conditions of societies having a sufficient degree of differentiation to require specialized agencies for the purposes of cultural transmission. Such societies, and especially those advanced industrial societies where education becomes central to social structure in both its aspect as a productive system and as an organisation of consumption, set complex and intractable problems for our understanding of the process of transmission. Their sociological study involves the analysis of a set of changing and developing relations between education and other aspects of social structure, as well as the study of classrooms, schools and colleges as social systems in their own right. Clearly all such studies are inter-related. It is possible to break them down into levels of analysis from the macro-sociology of the place of the educational system in the society as a whole, through the less general level of inquiry into the social structure and functioning of the constituent groups of the educational system (schools, universities, etc.) to the micro-sociology or social psychology of the school class. But the full significance of any given level of analysis is never revealed except in relation to other levels.

It is perhaps in the field of the micro-sociology of the school and the class that the need for research is most pressing. We lack an adequate sociology of the learning process, of teaching, of the classroom and of the school, but it is possible to suggest some of the lines which might be followed.

In the process of learning in classroom and school we can see once more the principles of integration and differentiation which we have already noted in the wider context of the educational system. We can see that a school class comes to hold something in common from its common learning experience: for example, all do subtraction by decomposition, all develop a common expectation and understanding about how to write compositions and about the purpose of doing so, all reach an agreement that anyone who likes poetry is a sissy. Classes develop norms and standards of their own. At the same time, they differentiate into sub-groups and individuals with their own roles which are understood within the group. We do not know nearly enough about these processes.

We require to study the effects of the process of integration on the learning of groups. In what way does teaching a class differ from teaching an individual? When a teacher transmits something to a group and the group comes to make it its own, what effects occur? Concrete examples may help to make this point. How far are felt literary judgements as opposed to those expressed in examination a function of individuals, of the influence of the teacher or of the group? Now and again we are made conscious of the potency of group pressures which we normally tend to ignore. An art class in the North Riding recently produced as a class a "school of art" with its own distinctive style apparently developed as a
result of working together in a group which contained a small nucleus of innovators, rather than as a result of the direct influence of the teacher. I myself belonged to a sixth form which generated as a group a standard of taste in contemporary art and literature (but not music) which appeared to be independent of the standards of our teachers. It is fair to say that a good deal of progressive thinking in education stresses the importance of such standards generated in the teaching group and even the most conservative teacher must often wonder whether he might have been instrumental in making the tone of this year's sixth so much worse than that of last year's. While I cannot cite any body of systematic research into this problem of formation of standards in groups in the classroom, I am suggesting both that research into these phenomena would be sociological and that a sufficient basis now exists in cultural and industrial sociology to allow such research to be undertaken with profit.

The process of differentiation in groups which is the other side of the picture may possibly be regarded rather as the province of social psychology than as that of sociology. A good deal of work has been done here, particularly in sociometry, which provides a ready technique for the analysis of groups into sub-groups. I have the feeling, however, that this work is not making the cumulative impact that is to be desired, and I wonder if this is due to the lack of a firm conceptual background rooted in the integrative processes of groups which we have just discussed. Some of the best British work is being done in Manchester where W.A.L. Blyth is particularly interested in the study of small groups.

When we turn from the sociology of learning to the sociology of teaching, we find once more a shortage of research despite a promising basis. Waller's Sociology of Teaching outlined the field and pointed to major problems as early as 1932, but as Jean Floud has remarked, it has been surprisingly little followed up, so that, thirty years old and now out of print, it still remains the best treatment of its subject. The problems seem to be twofold. First, we require an examination of teaching as an inescapable power situation in which authority to teach a group is given to one person; and the implications of this need to be followed into the psychology and the sociology of the learning process. Second, there is a need to study the process of delegation of power and the role of the teacher in the school structure. How is policy passed down - or up - the educational hierarchy and how is it modified in the process? What is the relative power of ministry, inspectors, heads, heads of department and teachers in shaping the activity of the classroom? The position of the teacher in society is relevant here, and has attracted more study than the process in which he takes part. This may be because studies can, like that of Asher Tropp, be historically based. Documentation rather than experiment or direct observation asks less in the way of co-operation. One can appreciate the practical difficulties in the way of studying, for example, the balance of power in school staffs.

So much, then, for the micro-sociology of the class and the school. Like so much of the sociology of education, this is not much more than a potential field for research, at any rate in this country. Fortunately, when we turn to the macro-sociology which is concerned with broad relations between school and society we shall find that more interest has been shown, perhaps because we are entering general sociology rather than educational sociology.

We are concerned here both with the interaction of learning in school and learning out of school and with the molar relations between educational systems and the societies which form their context.

Learning outside school may be seen as a product of direct social experience - the influence of economic and social conditions, of family, of neighbourhood, of adolescent groups - or as a product of symbolic social experience - the influence or art or mass communication.

A great number of social surveys exists, far too many for us to discuss them here. There are general studies of areas - Moss's Industrial Thameside, for example - there are surveys of families and neighbourhoods - Michael Young's Family and Kinship in East London and Family and Class in a London Borough are studies where the educational implications are made clear - and there are studies of adolescents - Jordan and Fisher's Self-Portrait of Youth and Reed's Eighty Thousand Adolescents for instance. In addition to these studies using survey techniques there are closer treatments of special fields such as Thrasher's The Gang.

The study of the process and effects of mass communication is a more recent interest but here again a great deal of work has been done, particularly in America.
Rosenberg (Bernard) and White (David M.) have edited a reader, *East Culture.* Wilbur Schramm amongst others has attempted an analysis of the process, and in this country there have been a number of detailed studies of press, cinema and television, the most important being Hilde Himmelweit's *Television and the Child.* What is most conspicuously lacking is a theoretically adequate account of the role of art and communication in society, the basis on which the line followed by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* could be developed sociologically. The germ of such a development lies in the study of the process of communication, the advance of techniques of content analysis and the study of habits of reading, listening and viewing with a particular emphasis on the need to distinguish and study groups with like habits and experience. For example, if we were in a position to make comparisons between, say, regular readers of the *Daily Mirror, People, Weekend and News of the World,* and regular readers of the *Times,* *Punch,* the *Economist,* and the *Sunday Times,* we should be in a much better position to estimate the influence of newspapers.

It is perhaps worth mentioning, as a footnote, that advertisers and public relations men are teachers and that their large research budgets have produced work relevant to education, unfortunately most of it unpublished. Mark Abrams' *The Teenage Consumer* is one such study which is readily available.

It remains to say a little about the molar relations between educational systems and societies. This is the highest level of generalization in the sociology of education, - the most speculative, the least empirical.

One line of attack would be to use classifications of societies derived from general sociology and to consider the educational implications of societal types. This is a classical approach, followed for example by Plato in *The Republic.* It is not one which finds much favour in Britain. Exception can be taken to the procedure of adopting in an educational context systems of classification devised because of their relevance to political, economic or social variables with which the educationist is not primarily concerned. Carl Weiss in *his Abriß der Pädagogischen Soziologie* follows this line which apparently commends itself more readily in Germany. A most interesting American enterprise is Edward Myer's *Education in the Perspective of History,* which attempts, as far as materials exist, a comparative study of education in the major civilizations distinguished by Arnold Toynbee in his *Study of History.* Arnold Rose's *Institutions of Advanced Societies* which incidentally contains the best brief account of the sociology of Britain today, is an attempt at a comparative sociology which might offer a more empirical, less theoretical, basis upon which to relate educational procedures to social systems and situations.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the aspiration towards explanation in comparative education is in essence an attempt to create a sociological background of just the sort we have been discussing. In so far as comparative education can break away from facile explanations of educational systems in terms of national characteristics, it should make an important contribution to the sociology of education. It must be confessed, however, that the methodological problems are acute.

I have tried in this brief paper to articulate the relevance of sociology to education upon the problems of curriculum content, educational opportunity and educational planning, and suggest a context in which sociological research bearing directly upon these problems might be expected to yield its broadest significance. If I have referred more often to prospects than to achievements, I hope that this has suggested a need for the interest, stimulus and financial support which will make possible a much greater volume of research in the sociology of education.

FOOTNOTES


Footnote

No.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Introductions to sociology with good material on culture:
   A good collection of essays written mainly from an anthropological and archaeological standpoint is:

2. For studies of the process of norming:
   JOHNSON, HARRY, op. cit.
   The classic work on norm in:
   Most textbooks of sociology cover the ground.

3. Social class, social mobility, and related educational problems:
   Works mentioned on social class and educational opportunity:

4. Economics of Education and educational planning:

5. Study of small groups:

6. Sociology of schools and teachers:
7. Social Surveys

There are so many social surveys that it is scarcely possible to do more than mention a few with special interest for the North-East.


- and two recent works which are both readable and clearly relevant to education:


8. Studies of Adolescents and Adolescent Groups, etc.


9. Mass Communication and Mass Culture


10. Brand relations of Education and Society, etc.


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