R842-09 ERIC REPORT RESUME

ED 010 219 1-31-67 24 (REV)

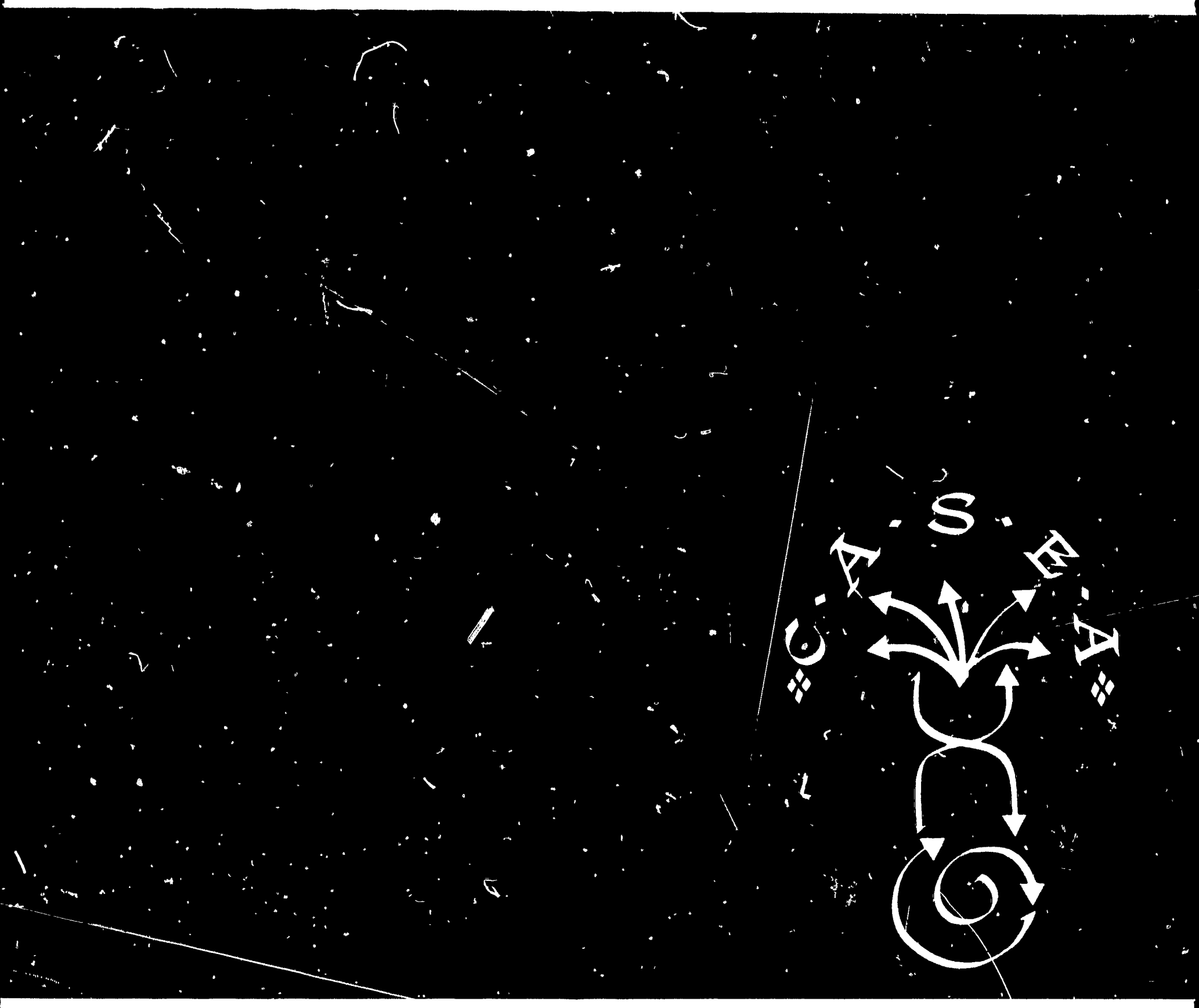
SOCIOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION--A DISCUSSION.

FOSKETT, JOHN M.
RQR60230 UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, EUGENE

BR-5-0217-OP-5
OP-5
- -65
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.76 19P.

*EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, *SOCIOLOGY, *SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS, THEORIES, RESEARCH PROBLEMS, CONFERENCES, *ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY, *ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS, EUGENE, OREGON

THE RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIOLOGY TO EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION WAS PRESENTED WITH EMPHASIS UPON THE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OF SOCIOLOGISTS. INCLUDED IN THE PRESENTATION WERE BACKGROUND EVENTS, CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION, AND THE PLACE OF FOLK-WISDOM AND ITS REPLACEMENT WITH SYSTEMATICALLY-TESTED KNOWLEDGE. (RS)



Occasional Paper No. 5

Center for the
Advanced
Study of
Educational
Administration

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
Eugene

SOCIOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL
ADMINISTRATION
A DISCUSSION

BY

JOHN M IOSKETI

SOCIOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: A DISCUSSION

By

JOHN M. FOSKETT
Research Associate

THE CENTER FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

A paper presented March 29, 1965 at a University of Oregon conference entitled "New Directions in Research in Educational Administration.

John M. Foskett

University of Oregon

I would like to discuss with you in these pages some ideas about the relation of sociology to educational administration, with particular emphasis on the research activities of sociologists and the way such research might relate to the problems of public school administration. It is hoped that some of the ideas set down here will provide a "launching pad" for a hearty discussion.

THE BACKGROUND

In many respects, extensive and systematic research in the field of education on the part of sociologists is relatively new. Even such a short time as twenty years ago only a few sociologists were carrying on inquiries that related to education, and these few individuals were somehow regarded by their collegaues as second class citizens. The only two exceptions I can think of at the moment are Willard Waller and Wilbur Brookover. For whatever reasons, there was among sociologists an anti-education bias as far as research was concerned.

During the past two decades a remarkable shift has taken place. Currently, many sociologists, and particularly those who are regarded as first class citizens, are actively engaged in investigations that relate both directly and indirectly to public school affairs. A few well known examples are A. H. Halsey, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Howard S. Becker, C. Wayne Gordon, Robin Williams, Burton Clark, Neal Gross, Wilbur Brookover, Everett Hughes, Orville Brim, and Peter Rossi. For several years now one

of the largest and most active formally organized Sections of the American Sociological Association has been that of the Sociology of Education. In addition, the programs of the Annual Meetings of this Association consistently list a large number of papers devoted to the sociology of education. Indeed, research in the field of educational sociology isbeginning to rank with such other traditional areas of inquiry as the family, industrial organization, social stratification, demography, political sociology, criminology, minorities, urban life, and mass communications. Further, there is every indication that the trend toward studies in the field of education will continue and become even more central to the sociological enterprise.

One is led to ask how this change has come about. While a complete answer is beyond our capacity, it would appear that the following circumstances are involved.

1. Trends in Sociological Research. During the past two decades sociologists have become increasingly interested in social systems or social structures. More and more, sociologists are asking how corporations, associations, communities, mental hospitals, churches, and other groupings are organized; how the type of organization relates to the goals being sought; how the organizational pattern affects the relations of individuals to each other; how organizational features give rise to or minimize stress; and a host of other outcomes that can be related to the nature of the system itself. More and more, sociologists are seeking explanations of social behavior in terms of the characteristics of social systems or sub-systems rather than in terms of the characteristics of individuals as such.

Because the public schools constitute one of the most obvious and easily accessible social systems, it was perhaps inevitable that sociologists would turn

to the schools as a major source of data. There is a school system in every community, and no sociologist can be very far away from a fertile field of investigation. Further, most school personnel are sympathetic with behavioral science research, and cooperation is virtually assured. As more sociologists turn to the study of selected features of social systems and as ever larger bodies of data are required, we may expect to find even more sociologists engaged in the study of the educational enterprise.

Within the broad framework of system analysis, sociologists have a wide and varied range of specific theoretical and empirical interests, including for example, socialization, motivation, learning, social stratification, deviant behavior, decision-making, power-structures, minority groups, social mobility, innovation, value systems, role behavior, bureaucracy, mental health, small groups, and institutional interrelations. A moment's reflection will reveal that data for each of these areas and many others can be found in the public schools. Indeed, it may be that there is no other single source where the sociologists can find such a wide range of relevant data.

2. The Availability of Research Funds. It is generally recognized that researchers in all fields tend to work on problems and in areas where financial support is most readily available. Perhaps, the classic case is the vast amount of work done in the field of atomic energy. Sociologists are no different than other scientists in this regard. Until recently, relatively little financial support was available to sociologists for empirical studies of school affairs. Beginning about 1950 (the W. K. Kellogg Foundation supported CPEA, for example), there has been a marked increase in the amount of support provided to sociologists by funding agencies, both public and private, for education related research. Currently,

grants provided by the United State Office of Education constitute one of the major sources of research funds for sociologists.

CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Paralleling the broad trend toward sociological research in the field of education, significant changes are taking place in the kinds of problems confronting school administrators and, consequently, the kinds of expertise required for their resolution. One of these changes appears particularly significant and relevant to this discussion. Reference is here made to the increasing emphasis on educational problems that are national in scope.

Not very many years ago the problems confronting educational leaders were primarily local and specific in that they pertained to the operation of the local school plant, the methods and techniques of classroom instruction, the content of the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, the relation of the schools to the local community, and a number of "housekeeping" functions. In general, the problems were seen as local or internal to the schools, only occasionally or indirectly involving the problems of the wider society. It was always assumed that if each school district did its job properly the problems confronting the wider society would be taken care of automatically. So great was our faith in the education of each person (the great panacea) that few people felt a need to look beyond the boundaries of the local school.

However, particularly since World War II, the schools of America have become increasingly and more directly involved in the problems of the wider society. Because this trend is part of a yet broader trend in American society, I would like to digress for a moment to outline the larger picture. We will then return to the place of the schools in the current situation.

During earlier periods of American history, most problems were seen as being either problems for the individual alone or for the local community. At one time

unemployment was seen largely as a result of the inadequacies (or "sins") of the individual, and, in general, the difficulty was for the individual himself or, at the most, for the individual and the members of the immediate family. More recently, we have come to view unemployment in terms of the consequences for the nation as a whole until, today, we see unemployment primarily as a major factor in national welfare. More and more, we see unemployment in its relation to the gross national product, national defense, mental health, crime rates, old age security, and the public welfare burden.

Not only do we now see unemployment as having consequences that go far beyond the individual, but we also see it as being the result of factors other than the characteristics of the individual. It is now clear that unemployment is primarily the result of the state of the economy and a wide range of impersonal forces beyond the control of the individual.

Similarly, mental disease was once seen as something resulting solely from some weakness within the individual(if not the work of evil spirits) and as something that affected the individual alone or those close to him. Gradually, we have come to regard mental disease as a threat to the total society and something that must be dealt with at the national level. Witness the extensive activity of the National Institute of Mental Health and the many other private and public agencies engaged in programs to improve the mental health of the nation as a whole. As with unemployment, we no longer view poor mental health as the result of something peculiar to the individual. Rather, we now see many of the mental diseases as a product of the basic social conditions and processes such as urban living, role conflict, inadequate socialization, and organizational pressures.

In a similar fashion, such other problem areas as physical health, suicide, divorce, race conflict, alcoholism, dope addiction, crime, and even automobile accidents, have been redefined. Each was at one time an individual or local problem but has come to be perceived as a national problem. In turn, our explanations of each have shifted from something about the individual or his immediate circumstance to something about the broader social context within which he lives.

This pattern of redefinition of problems is a consequence of a number of factors, two of which can be noted here. First of all, the sheer increase in the number of people and the increasing complexity of our culture serve to extend and multiply the consequences of the behavior of individuals. A maritime strike on the Pacific Coast can lead to unemployment in Boston, and "drop-outs" in New York can increase dope addiction in Los Angeles.

Secondly, we are today much more aware of the interrelations of things and can see beyond the individual to the broader and perhaps more basic causes of some of our difficulties. Epidemiology, for instance, has demonstrated the relation between the social class structure and the type and rate of mental disease. An ability to see problems in a broader social context has been one of the major contributions of the social sciences.

Returning now to the field of education, it is becoming increasingly clear that we are now in the process of redefining many of the problems confronting public education in much the same manner as we have already redefined many of our problems in other areas. Let me use the problem of "drop-outs" as an example.

It used to be that "drop-outs" were viewed as individual problems. The consequences were seen as bearing primarily upon the pupil. It was assumed that

"drop-outs" were simply not capable of continuing and that maybe all concerned would be better off if the pupil terminated his or her education and secured employment. Even the teacher and the other students would benefit. Today, in contrast, it is recognized that "drop-outs" constitute a serious national problem in that they contribute significantly to the unemployment rate. A disproportional number of the unemployed are younger persons, many having insufficient training to be employed in an increasingly technical economy. Given this reorientation, the schools are now being asked to do something about "drop-outs" as a national problem, as opposed to dealing with individual cases on their own merits. This redefinition of the problem calls for new approaches and new insights. In passing, it is to be noted that it has not been school administrators that have taken the lead in redefining the problem. Rather, it has been leaders in government and business who have perceived the problem and have made the demands upon the schools.

The shift in focus that has taken place in regard to "drop-outs" has been or is being paralleled by a similar shift in focus in regard to a number of other problem areas such as public support of the educational enterprise, delinquency, occupational choices of students, teacher recruitment, curriculum innovation, and racial integration. If this trend is at all basic, as it appears, we can anticipate the redefinition of a number of other areas now regarded as specific and local in nature.

In the discussion above it has been intimated that the progressive redefinition of educational problems, in turn, calls for new kinds of knowledge. We can now develop this point further and relate it to the research activities of the sociologists.

It is here taken for granted that whenever a problem is restated a different set of relevant variables are called into play. A common example of this fact is that of explanations of suicide. When one asks the question,"Why do individuals commit suicide?" the question involves the factors that "cause" specific individuals to end their lives. Stated this way, the relevant variables are things about the individual, his health, business failure, nervous condition, lack of strong and supportive ties with relatives and friends, and a number of other immediate conditions acting upon the individual. When, however, one asks the question in another form, "How does one account for differences in suicide rates between two populations?" a different set of variables become relevant. The two questions are distinctly different and correspondingly the answers will be different. When one seeks to account for differences in <u>suicide rates</u> instead of <u>individual cases</u> of suicide the explanatory factors become age composition for the population, the compatibility of the roles occupied by people, the extent of sanctions for failure, religious composition, and other variables peculiar to populations of people rather than to individuals. The same distinction is to be made between explaining individual automobile accidents and explaining the <u>rate</u> of automobile accidents.

Let us now try to apply this distinction to those problems confronting public school administration, particularly as they are being redefined. For this purpose we can again use the problem of "drop-outs" as an example. As long as the problem of "drop-outs" was viewed in its individual and local aspects the relevant variables were the abilities of the individual, his relations with his teachers, his family or home situation, and perhaps his health. Given this formulation of the problem the teacher and principal had a reasonable chance of making sense out of the

situation and of finding an acceptable course of action. However, when the problem is restated in terms of "drop-out" rates and national trends, a whole new set of variables come into existence. No simple summation of the explanations of individual cases of "drop-outs" can reveal the reasons for a given "drop-out" rate or a particular trend in the rate. Now the relevant variables become such things as peer group relations, sub-cultures, the youth role structure, social class patterns, marital rates, and the structure of rewards and sanctions employed by the wider society. It is the variables of this second type that must be identified and eventually manipulated if the schools are to participate effectively in the solving of the problem of "drop-outs." It is for this reason that the restating of problems is so significant.

It follows, then, that if school administrators are to respond to the challenges being presented to them, they must somehow acquire a whole new set of knowledges. But, and here is the rub, the standard training and experiences of both teachers and administrators does not provide the kind of knowledge required to deal with the problems of the emerging kind. This kind of knowledge can be provided only by those people engaged in a full-time professional study of societal patterns and processes.

Put simply, this means that school administrators must turn to the social sciences, and for the purpose of this particular discussion, to sociology. Not because sociology has a private pipe-line to the body of perfect knowledge that is stored-up in heaven, but because sociologists are in the business of carrying out particular kinds of studies, the findings of which may be particularly relevant to the emerging problems of education.

Reverting for a moment to the discussion of trends in sociological research at the very beginning of this paper, it is now possible to point to a current convergence of the activities of education and sociology. Almost as if by design, the educational administrator and the sociologist are coming to be concerned with the same type and scope of problems, one as a practitioner and the other as a researcher.

What is critical, however, is the way this convergence is to be implemented. Some very serious questions remain as to how these two professions can work together, for there are pitfalls. Let me mention just a few. First of all, there is always the danger that people in the field of education will not be sufficiently critical of the work of sociologists. There have been too many instances in the past where educational leaders have blindly accepted the alleged findings of some sociologist. School administrators must acquire some familiarity with the methodology of sociology if only to be able to differentiate between good and bad research. A healthy degree of skepticism must be maintained lest both parties suffer. Secondly, and correspondingly, educators must become much more critical of their own ability to deal with the emerging new kinds of problems. Because education has enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in the past there is an understandable tendency to acquire a feeling of complete adequacy. Thirdly, there is the danger that the educational fraternity will play a passive role in its relation to sociology, waiting patiently until the necessary knowledge is brought to it on a silver platter. It is crucial that educators become aggressive, making their needs known to sociologists and even on occasion participating in the development of new research programs involving professional sociologists. Fourth, there is the very serious difficulty of channels of communication between education and sociology.

Even at the moment, there is a considerable body of sociological research findings that is relevant to school administration, but it is buried in professional journals, in books, in courses, and in office files. Traditional channels of communication are not adequate for the dissemination of such materials, and new arrangements need to be worked out if the convergence pointed to above is to be useful to education. Any new approaches to the problem of communication must be radically different from those now in existence.

FOLK-WISDOM VERSUS TESTED KNOWLEDGE

Throughout the above discussion emphasis has been given to the emerging problems of educational administration. However, much of what has been stated applies also to the more traditional problems of the schools. In order to explore this point a bit let me begin with a brief review of the place of folk-wisdom in modern society.

Every field has had and still has its own folk-wisdom, a body of ideas and practices that have accumulated over relatively long periods of time and that have become broadly accepted as "correct." This folk-wisdom originally grew out of casual observation in everyday experience, some of it being particularly shrewd and sound and part of it being unsound and even bordering on the superstitious. Ordinarily, however, because of the lack of adequate tests, we have no basis for distinguishing between what is valid and what is invalid. Hence, we apply our folk-wisdom indiscriminantly, sometimes with fortunate and sometimes with unfortunate consequences.

First in one area and then in another, we have been for sometime now replacing our folk-wisdom with systematically tested knowledge. This process has been

taking place earlier in some areas than in others and is never complete in any given area. Always it is a matter of degree.

The field of agriculture offers an example. Down into the twentieth century farming was based largely on a body of folk-wisdom handed down from generation to generation. For the most part farmers were not educated and did not know very much about seed and plant stocks, the processes of organic growth, soil chemistry, food requirements of crops, plant diseases and their control, and the many other factors in successful production. Their only guide was the conventional wisdom of the past and the results were often dismal.

Somewhat rapidly over the past few decades, a far reaching revolution has taken place in the field of agriculture. Through the efforts of agricultural experiment stations, county agents, schools of agriculture, and other agencies, a vast body of scientific knowledge has been produced and made available to farmers. Much of this new knowledge has replaced the conventional wisdom of the past and has given farmers a degree of control not dreamed possible a half century ago.

Something similar has happened or is happening in other areas, although in varying degrees. Certainly there has been a revolution in medicine and in industry even though some individuals still eat fish as a "brain food" and some business men still ignore the basic principles of personnel administration.

From the perspective of the sociologist, a large part of educational practice in American schools is still based on an accumulated body of folk-wisdom. This view is supported by testimony from many educators themselves as well as by an examination of the literature of education and the programs of national meetings of professional educational groups. At the same time, there are signs that a revolution in education comparable to the earlier revolution in agriculture is in

the offing. The signs consist of new research centers for educational research, expressed interest by educators in the findings of the social sciences, increased activity by social scientists in the educational area, and perhaps by a growing public demand for a strengthening of the educational program. While these developments do not assure a revolution, they at least suggest the possibility. What is necessary if there is to be a far reaching revolution in education is a further implementation of the convergence of education and the social sciences, the working out of new arrangements for the communication of behavioral science findings to the educational fraternity, and the development of capacities for the translation of basic research findings into policies and practices.

Again, it is at this point that the interests of sociology and the needs of education meet. Although far from being adequate, past and present sociological research in regard to such subjects as local support of the schools, information levels of the citizenry, patterns of role expectations, community leadership structures, the social bases of motivation, the organizational structures of schools, the conditions and processes of innovation, the relation of social class membership of classroom behavior, the social bases of occupational choices, and the broad subject of the social context of the entire educational program, offer many sound bases for the formulation, or reformulation, of policies to replace folk-wisdom.*

*For a further discussion of the relations of education and sociology the following three publications are particularly useful. Neal Gross, "The Sociology of Education," in Sociology Today, edited by Robert K. Merton, Leonard Broom, and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., New York: Basic Books, 1959, Chapter 5; Charles H. Page, editor, Sociology and Contemporary Education, New York: Random House, 1961; and Orville G. Brim, Jr., Sociology and the Field of Education, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1958.

A revolution in education cannot be achieved by the efforts of educators alone any more than the agricultural revolution could have been achieved by the farmers alone. Such an effort can result only in the substitution of one body of folk-wisdom for another, and this may be what some individuals are attempting to do in California at the present moment.