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THE FUNCTIONS OF RESEARCH FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION.

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THE PROBLEM OF IMPROVING EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION WAS DISCUSSED. THE SUGGESTION WAS MADE THAT IMPROVEMENT BY GETTING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE WAS A PROCESS OF RATIONALIZING ACTIVITY IN BOTH AREAS. THE FUNCTION OF RESEARCH FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION WAS APPROACHED AT THREE LEVELS--TECHNICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND GOAL-ATTAINMENT IDENTIFICATION. THE TECHNICAL LEVEL PROVIDED A BASIS FOR RATIONALIZING THE MEANS FOR ATTAINMENT OF EDUCATIONAL GOALS. THE ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL SERVED THE SAME FUNCTION RELATIVE TO THE GOALS OF PROCURING AND MOBILIZING RESOURCES. THE THIRD LEVEL FUNCTIONED TO IDENTIFY THE OBJECTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF ADOPTING CERTAIN GOALS, AND THE MEANS OF ATTAINING THOSE GOALS, FOR THE LARGER STRUCTURES IN WHICH THESE GOALS AND MEANS ARE EMBEDDED. (RS)

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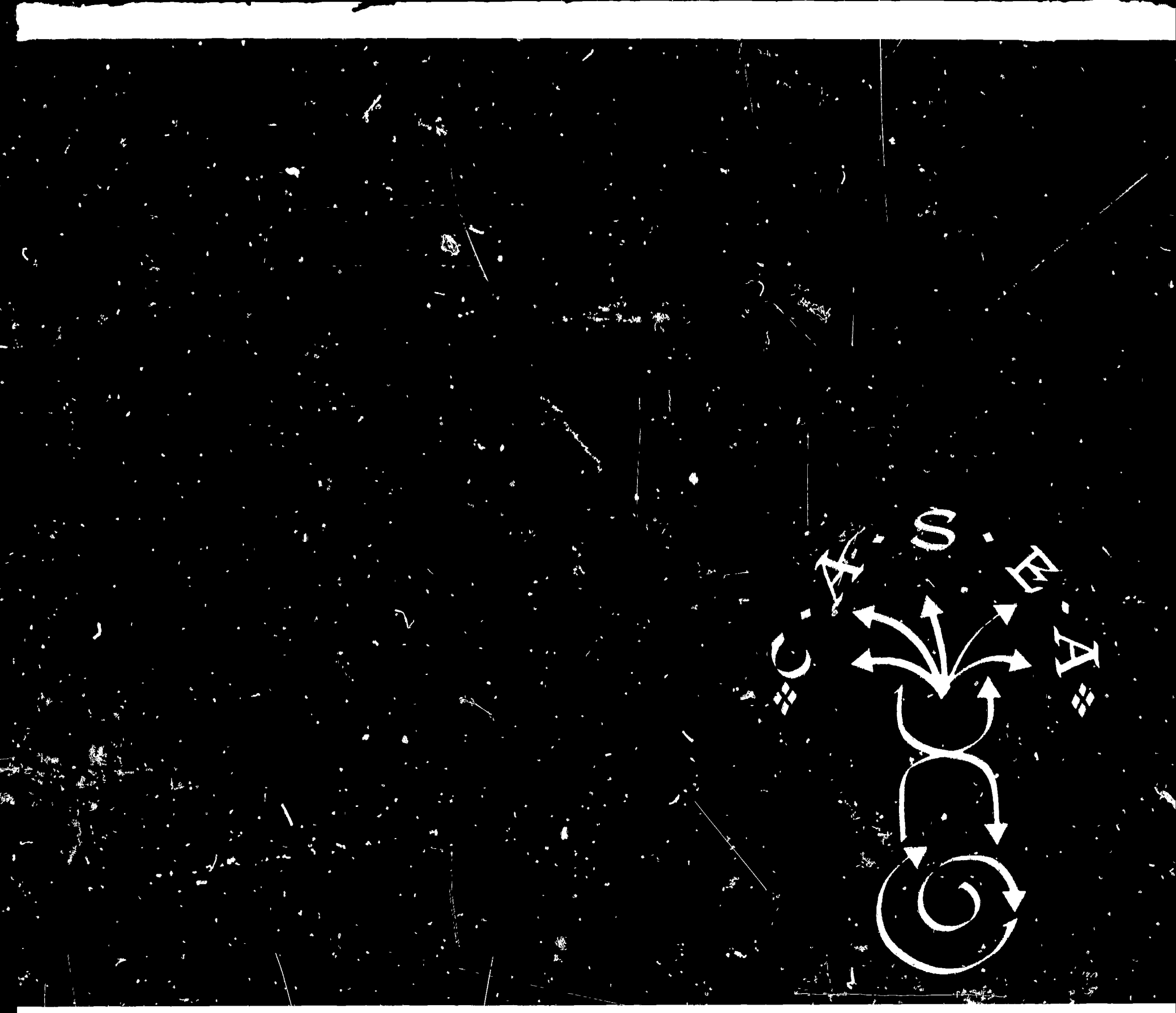

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BY

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THE FUNCTIONS OF RESEARCH FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION*

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"What are the functions of research for educational administration?" Now there is an intriguing question! Within the field, this question has never been considered seriously, or at least debated openly. For the most part, we have simply assumed--at least for the past decade and a half--that research has important functions both in the training of teachers and administrators, and in the practice of teaching and administration. We have assumed, for example, that teaching can be improved by making provision for an initial grounding in, and continued familiarity with, the research literature related to learning and motivation. Similarly, we have assumed that administration can be improved by making provision for an initial grounding in, and continued familiarity with, the research literature related to leadership and organization. In short, we have

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defined our problem as one of improving education by getting research into practice without ever raising the question of what it is that research contributes to practice.

In what follows, I want to suggest that improving education and educational administration by getting research into practice is essentially a process of rationalizing activity in these two areas. Education has long since become rationalized in several respects. On the one hand, the admission of persons to occupational positions in education is based on impersonally applied standards of performance in the acquisition of expertese.* On the other hand, the internal operation of educational organizations is governed by the application of impersonal, bureaucratic rules.[1] The sense in which education, i.e., teaching and administration, has not become rationalized is a technological one. Here we may say that:

> Action...is rational in so far as there is a scientifically demonstrable probability that the means employed will, within the conditions of the actual situation, bring about or maintain the future state of affairs that the actor anticipates as his end.[2]

As an example, consider the rationalization of agricultural practice. What has happened in agriculture over an extended period of time, as well as in many other areas of human activity, is that practice has become emancipated from custom and tradition. In less general terms, we may see that this process of emancipation, or rationalization, involves

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* Whether this expertese is "real" or only presumed is not the issue here.

several fundamental shifts in the value patterns governing the relevant activities. First, it involves a moral neutralization of the elements involved in the activity.[3] Land, for example, comes to be viewed not as the home of one's ancestors, and as a heritage to be passed on to one's descendants, but as a morally neutral commodity devoid of intrinsic value. In "underdeveloped" areas one can find numerous examples of objects that are not morally neutral. In several African cultures, for example, cattle are viewed not as neutral objects having alternative uses, but as symbols of status and prestige. In India, the cow is regarded as a sacred object.

The same point can be generalized to patterns of activity and to social relationships. For example, it is only recently that there has come to be a morally acceptable alternative to marriage and motherhood for the woman in American society. Similarly, there is no morally acceptable alternative to conjugal family as the pattern within which procreation and the early socialization of children takes place. The process of rationalization thus involves a gradual diminishing of the conception that it is right to treat or to do certain things in certain ways and at certain times, and the substitution of the conception of morally neutral alternatives.

The morally neutral approach enables one to adopt whatever means or approach is best suited to bring about the state of affairs that the individual anticipates as his end, i.e., the one that gets the best results. This emphasis on achievement of results, or performance,

constitutes the second shift that is involved in rationalization. It involves a shift from the acceptance of existing patterns of use, activity, and states of affairs as given in the order of things, to an emphasis on getting results, improving one's state, and asking of existing patterns and objects what they do, or what can be done with them. To the member of the primitive culture, illness may be an aspect of life to be accepted as part of the natural order. For the member of Western societies, it is something to be conquered and overcome. For the physician, the question becomes, "What does this pattern of activity do, or what can be done with this object, in relation to the end in view?" For the member of the primitive society, however, the question is, "What is the place of this pattern, or object, in the order of things?" Thus, for the East Indian of Hindu background, there is no question of what the cow does, or what can be done with the cow. The cow is a sacred object whose place is given in the order of things. Similarly, for the devout orthodox Jewish family there is no question of what can be done with one's time on the Sabbath; that time has been allocated by ascription to a certain usage. For the devout Jew the matter of how it is to be spent is not even a question. It is accepted as given.

The third shift may be seen in the tendency to differentiate specific properties of objects and patterns of activity instead of treating them as global entities, or undifferentiated cycles of activity. In order to conceive the land as an instrumental object, one that is morally neutral and from which one wishes to get certain results, one must focus

attention on the specificities of its properties. Whether it is hilly, rocky, well-drained, etc., matters little when there is no conception of alternative usage in the interest of results. But, when the question of alternative usage in the interest of given results arises there must be a concern for specifically differentiated properties of the land.

Before alternative patterns of activity can be compared in terms of the results they must be considered impartially in terms of their intrinsic similarities. If any approach is viewed in terms of its unique individuality, it cannot, by definition, be compared with others. Farming techniques, for example, cannot become morally neutral alternatives until they are viewed as intrinsically similar in at least some respects and therefore comparable in terms of an objective standard. Thus, it was not possible for cattle and sheep raising to be treated as neutral alternatives by the early cattlemen until both activities were no longer viewed in terms of their uniquely individual characteristics.

With the diminution of emphasis on uniqueness it becomes possible to evaluate the contribution of different patterns of activity to a given end in terms of standards of cognitive validity; objective, scientifically demontrable, empirically tested truth. One may prefer to do something a certain way because it serves his own interests, or those of some group with which he is affiliated, to have it done so. For example, a man who sells lanterns may have good reason for advocating the notion that potatoes grow best when planted in the dark of the moon, but this is quite different from subjecting alternative approaches to controlled empirical tests in which every approach is measured and evaluated in

terms of a common, objective criterion. The fourth shift, then, is from a subjective, or particularistic approach, to an objective, or universalistic approach.

Thus, when individuals take a morally neutral interest in the specific properties of objects for the sake of achieving objectively verifiable results we say that the activity has become rationalized. And, when such activities have been repeated again and again, when they have been standardized, we say that a technology has been developed.

What is the relevance of all this to the topic, "The Functions of Research for Educational Administration?" Education is one of the few remaining areas of activity that has not been subject to technological rationalization. One function of research for education, and hence for educational administration, is to provide the basis for the rationalization of educational practice, for the development of a technology of education. Just as the research conducted by the agricultural experiment station provided the basis for an agricultural technology, so, within limits, will the research on education provide the basis for an educational technology.

Agricultural experimentation, based on basic research in the natural sciences, provides the farmer with the knowledge base on which technically rational decisions can be made. The agricultural experiment station provides a setting in which the knowledge generated in basic research is transformed into agricultural technologies, and in which concrete, visible evidence of the results achieved is demonstrated under conditions

approximating those on the farms where the practices are to be used. These factors, coupled with the activities of the Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service, insure a rather rapid diffusion of improved farm practices.* The agricultural situation provides a useful analogy, to education if one does not push it too far. There are highly important differences between the two areas of activity that one can ignore only at his own peril, and which imply that research has somewhat different functions for educational administration.

The first difference between the two areas is the fact that the objects on which educational activities are practiced are human individuals, and the limits to rationality are much narrower here than where animals and physical objects are concerned. People are understandably reluctant to have their children subjected to experimentation, that is, they are unique, particular objects. Even the suggestion that we should create "educational experiment stations" would very likely arouse heated controversy. Even so, within the limits to rationality posed by the human factor, there are broad areas that are subject to technological

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*This is not to suggest that the rationalization of agriculture is a simple matter of making improved techniques available. The difficulties encountered in this area are amply documented in the literature of Rural Sociology. For example, see Herbert F. Lionberger, "The Diffusion of Innovations with Applications From Agricultural Research to Implemented Change in School Systems". A paper presented at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Seminar on Strategy for Curriculum Change at New Orleans, Louisana, January, 1965

treatment. Given the entirely acceptable goals of teaching reading, mathematics, spelling, etc., there is a good deal of room for the improvement of the partially rationalized practices already in existence.

A second distinction is the fact that educational agencies are not competitive; their survival does not depend on the accumulation of surplus resources. Given the lack of competitiveness, and the fact that they survive and expand in spite of what they do, there is less incentive to increase technological efficiency. Efficiency increases most rapidly when people are interested in accumulating a financial surplus for use in other activities or in the expansion activities. In business or in farming, the person who uses efficient means succeeds, and the inefficient person fails. "Greater efficiency means that more resources are left over to use in other undertakings, while lesser efficiency means contraction of resources and dimunition of activities."[4] The conception of failure in this sense is totally foreign to the field of education.

Finally, a further distinction between the agricultural and educational cases is the fact that the former involved individuals, or at most families, rather than complex organizations. The agricultural extension agent had only the individual farmer, and perhaps the farmer's family, to deal with. While the difficulties involved should not be minimized, it is quite clear that the resistances to change, the vested interests involved, varies in proportion to the size of the group involved. It is well known that in any established pattern of social interaction participants come to have a fundamental interest in

maintaining the gratifications that accrue to them. It is equally well known that such gratifications go well beyond economic and material factors to include those deriving from living up to institutionalized expectations, approval, esteem, and power.

Thus, in education, far more than in agriculture, rationalization is limited by the vested interests of participants. The rationalization of agriculture depended on the individual farmer's adoption of improved technologies which, although doubtless influenced by the attitudes and opinions of neighbors, was somewhat simplified.* The two cases would be more comparable if we were to visualize a situation in which farming operations were organized so that at least two levels of operation were involved. There would, of course, be the technical level at which the technology of agriculture was applied to the actual productive process. In addition there would be the managerial, or administrative, level concerned, to be sure, with technical productive processes, but concerned primarily with the coordination of those processes, the procurement and distribution of resources within the organization, the marketing of the product, and the making of decisions about the scale of operation.

Administrative personnel must inevitably be concerned about the technical processes of production. But, since in any complex operation

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*This is an over-simplification. Even though common sense would suggest that only the individual or family is involved, research evidence clearly indicates that social relations with neighbors, and others is an important factor. See the previously cited paper by Lionberger.

they cannot possibly know as much about these processes as their technically skilled subordinates, they must focus their attention on the problems of motivating technical personnel to do what only they know how to do. And, since technological improvements continue to be made, there is the added problem of getting technical personnel, who have a vested interest in maintaining established patterns of operation, to adopt technological innovations. The goal of the technical level worker is to produce potatoes, or whatever, and the research-based technology enables him to achieve that end in a rational, technologically efficient manner. But the goal of the administrator is the mobilization of all organizational resources in order to maximize the attainment of organizational goals, i.e., the production fo some kind of commodity. Among the resources to be mobilized those which occupy the key place are the motivations and behaviors of the members of the organization itself, both in the execution of accepted procedures and in the adoption of improved procedures. In short, the primary function of research for educational administration, above and beyond the rationalization of the technical processes of education, is the rationalization of the means of mobilizing organizational resources. This is the function of research with respect to the internal operation of the educational organization. Externally, it involves the same process with respect to product marketing and resource procurement. Since what is procurement to the organization is allocation from the point of view of society, and since resources are allocated to educational agencies through political processes rather than

economic processes, rationalization of this area involves the rationalization of school-community politics. This is to say that the interest of the educational administrator in research concerning community decision-making derives from his desire to improve his techniques for influencing the authoritative allocation of community resources. The research base for the development of administrative technologies, if we may call them that, is research in the social sciences.

Considered on this level, we have probably taken the analysis as far as it is fruitful to go. Indeed, if we remain at this level we can do little more than to specify more concretely the various ways in which research can contribute to the ability of teachers and administrators to perform their functions. That is, if we assume that we know what the functions of administrative activity are, then we can specify a number of ways in which research contributes to the performance of those functions.. Similarly, if we assume that we know what the functions of education are, then we can specify a number of ways in which research contributes to the performance of those functions.

But the problem, I maintain, is that we do not know what the functions of administrative activity are. And we do not know what the functions of education are. Although there are volumes upon volumes of ideological exhortations and prescriptions concerning what the functions of education should be, there is relatively little in the way of concrete knowledge concerning the actual, objective consequences of existing patterns of educational activity. That is to say, we have a great deal

of information regarding the subjective dispositions--aims, motives, and purposes--attributed to education, but we know little enough about what schools actually do, and practically nothing about the objective consequences of these activities for the larger structures in which the schools are involved. Similarly, although textbooks, course syllabi, and professional journals are filled to overflowing with normative statements concerning the aims and purposes of teachers and administrators, there is again little concrete knowledge regarding either what they do, or the objective consequences of these activities.

The fact that the ideologically given, or manifest functions, of education and of administration, are taken at face value, and not themselves subject to research, means that the research done tends to concern itself exclusively with finding ways of doing a better job of achieving these objectives. The objectives given in the prevailing ideology, however, are likely to be more or less severe distortions of reality which serve both to justify existing patterns of operation, and to obscure the objective consequences of those patterns, i.e., latent functions. This, in turn, means that an additional function of research as it presently operates, is the perpetuation of existing patterns of operation the objective consequences of which are not comprehended by those who perpetuate them.

There are three major consequences of this tendency to take the ideologically defined objectives as given. First, given the tendency of researchers to select problems that are considered important, most

research centers around problems retlated to the attainment of these objectives. Second, since the ideological definition is at best only a partial explication of objectives, it means that however valid the research, it may have little impact on what actually happens in schools. Merton has given the basic reason for this in the succinct statement, "To seek social change without due recognition of the manifest and latent functions performed by the social organization undergoing change, is to indulge in social ritual rather than social engineering."[5] Thus, however suggestive research may be in terms of manifest functions, if it conflicts with important latent functions its impact is likely to be minimal and short-lived. This point can be illustrated in the case of programmed instruction. Here is one readily available means for achieving the frequently stated educational goal of maximizing the progress of individual students. It is the technological means par excellence, with at least some research evidence to indicate that it is an efficient approach to the transmission of some kinds of skills and knowledge. But, as Carlson's observations have revealed, at least some teachers developed effective ways of minimizing the impact of the innovation. In Carlson's words, ". . .teachers were actually restricting the output of the students proceeding at the faster rates."[6] One practice that emerged in this context was that of diverting some of the energies of the more rapid learners away from the programmed material by channeling it into "enrichment" programs. Now, whatever the avowed purpose of this emphasis on enrichment, one objective consequence of it was to diminish the differential rate of

student progress through the programmed materials. The implication of these observations is that the activities replaced by programmed instruction served functions beyond those stated explicitly by teachers. Moreover, the enrichment program served functions beyond enrichment, one of which was to reduce the impact of the programmed materials.

The third consequence of taking the ideologically defined objectives as given has been suggested above. We simply do not know what the objective consequences of educational practices are in terms of their impact on the larger structures in which they are implicated. Few persons were consciously aware, for example, of the extent to which the community elementary school, so deeply embedded in educational ideology, had the objective consequence of perpetuating racial and socio-economic segregation. Similarly, few persons are aware of the extent to which the school functions to selectively allocate youth into various categories of adult roles. That is, one objective consequence of the existing pattern of operation of the educational enterprise is that it provides a mechanism through which the youth of society are differentiated into college-bound and non-college-bound groups, and within those groups, into technically-oriented and socially-oriented contingents.[7] In and of itself, there is nothing very startling about this revelation; this is precisely what vocational guidance is all about. But one wonders about the effect of variations in the school program on the distribution and composition of the several contingents. And, since the selection process seems to begin in early elementary school one must speculate about the possibilities of

controlling the allocative process through appropriate changes in the school program. One attempt to do something of this kind, although the objectives are not stated in these terms, is the attention being given to the enrichment of the background of "culturally different" children.

Recognition of the fact that the school functions to sort out a "human relations-oriented" contingent, the members of which at the college-bound level will probably fill leadership roles in business, industry, and politics, leads one to pose some questions about this aspect of the socialization process. Socialization and training for leadership in the public school is done in an unconscious, hit or miss manner. The only provision for this kind of training, if one can call it that, would seem to be the casual, informal, extracurricular activities that are, by definition, "extra", or outside of the primary concerns of the school. There are two points to be made in this connection. The first is that the identification and training of leaders is "extra" only in the ideological sense. The schools are identifying and to some extent training persons for leadership roles in society. Whether school personnel repudiate this as a responsibility of the school or not is irrelevant, it is an objective consequence of educational activity. The second point is that the focus of research is likely to be on problems related to the manifest functions, which means that present arrangements are likely to be prepetuated even though they may be irrational when viewed as means to higher level goals. That is to say, focusing all our attention on the problem of rationalizing the means of attaining ideologically-given

goals automatically precludes the possibility of treating these goals as means to higher-level goals which, in turn, may need to be rationalized.

To summarize, it would seem that the question, "What is the function of research for educational administration?" should be approached on at least three different levels. First, at the technical level, its function is to provide the basis for rationalizing the means for the attainment of educational goals, for the development of technologies of education. Second, at the administrative level, it serves the same function in relation to the goals of procurring and mobilizing resources. Third, in each of these areas, it functions, or at least can function, to identify the objective consequences of adopting certain goals, and certain means of attaining those goals, for the larger structures in which these goals and means are embedded.

FOOTNOTES

1. This is one sense in which Max Weber used the term rationalization. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, New York: Galaxy Books, 1958, Chapter VIII.

2. Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1937, p. 699.

3. A number of the ideas presented here were taken from Paul Diesing, Reason in Society, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1962, Chapters I and II.

4. Ibid., p. 10.

5. Robert Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (revised edition), New York: The Free Press, 1957, p. 81.

6. Richard O. Carlson, "Programmed Instruction: Some Unanticipated Consequences," mimeograph, p. 8.

7. Talcott Parsons, Social Structure and Personality, New York: The Free Press, 1964, Chapter VI.