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ABSTRACT

In third world countries a key to the course of nation building is the modernization of the organizational and administrative infrastructures that drive the development process. The focus of this paper is the ministry of education (MOE), an institution that has found its role changed dramatically since midcentury in most Latin American nations. In order to promote the modernization of management activities in ministries, it is first essential to understand their existing patterns of operation. Toward this objective, the paper presents a methodological framework for a field study approach. Specifically, the paper explores some of the issues involved in using a participant-observation field research methodology in studying major policy issues reaching from the top to the bottom of the MOE hierarchy. The paper stresses the importance of such activities as (1) being sensitive to the subtleties of the ideal/real dualism, (2) responding to the Latin American concerns of academic colonialism, (3) beginning study at the bottom of the hierarchy (local school level) and working upwards, (4) shifting from a sustained to a transitory methodology as the researcher moves up the hierarchy, and (5) looking for similarities and differences between selected regions or states in order to get closer to a national perspective. (Author/JM)

FIELD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF LATIN AMERICAN MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

FIELD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF LATIN AMERICAN MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION

In Third World countries a key to the course of nation building is the modernization of the organizational and administrative infrastructures which drive the development process. Increasing the operational capabilities, effectiveness, and efficiency of the ministry of education, and hence the quality and quantity of school outcomes, is typically a high priority item in the development plans of a nation. In order to promote the modernization of management activities in ministries, however, it is first essential to understand their existing patterns of operation. Toward this objective, the paper presents a methodological framework for a field study approach to the examination of the working of a ministry of education in Latin America. Several issues are introduced which influence the process of inquiry, such as: (1) examining the impact of historical traditions on contemporary management procedures, (2) exploring concerns for ethics and academic colonialism, (3) distinguishing between anthropological and sociological participant-observation field methods, (4) gathering and analyzing data on complex ministries, and (5) exploring the task of Third World theory building.

FIELD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF

LATIN AMERICAN MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION

In many nations of Latin America drives toward social and economic development, coupled with a systematic accumulation of capital, labor, and technology have forged the foundation and framework of modernization. At the focal point of the complex mechanisms which drive the development machinery are the organizational and administrative processes of management; activities which are usually the direct responsibility of the executive branch of government.

Typically, the executive branch of a country is composed of ministries of government, each with responsibility over programs falling within specific sectors of society, such as ministries of agriculture, labor, mines, education, war, finance, public works, health, and others. The specific focus of this paper is the ministry of education (MOE), an institution which has found its role changed dramatically since mid century in most Latin American nations. Ministries of education have been trying to restructure and redirect their own operations because the infrastructures of national development are served poorly by educational systems designed historically to produce a social elite and serve agriculturally based economies (Solari, 1967; Paulston, 1971).

The ministries of education in the various nations come in all sizes and shapes, some glittering like branch offices of the Palace of Versailles and others standing as monuments to brute stone and concrete. Aside from appearances, however, all have several things in common. For example, each ministry of education is normally delegated the responsibility for: managing one of the largest blocks of public money in the national budget, developing and supervising an instructional program for all the schools in the country, training and placing teachers, establishing examination procedures, building and maintaining schools, and virtually everything else. In short, it could be argued that few instruments of government in a developing nation surpass the ministry of education in the importance of its mission, range and depth of involvement in national and local affairs, and funding behind people and facilities.

Hence, we arrive at the question central to this paper. How does one study a large, complex ministry of education? Specifically, how does one study the organizational and administrative processes that give form and function to the operations of the MOE? The constraints to such study are indeed formidable. For example, the management processes are rooted in cultural traditions established during the 300 year history of Spanish colonial rule, the hierarchical levels extend from an N of 1 at the top to a cast of thousands at the bottom, virtually no meaningful body of research literature exists on the subject (discounting public information documents), and not the least of which is the black box mystique of a MOE which suggests it is so confusing that it is beyond understanding (and perhaps beyond help).

Consequently, the importance of the topic and the imposing constraints surrounding it lay down an intriguing challenge to inquiry, and establish the basis for the objectives of this paper.

Objectives

This paper represents an attempt to establish a methodological framework of inquiry which can facilitate the activities of a field researcher as he or she attempts to gain insight into the complex workings of a ministry of education. The technique of participant observation is emphasized, or as Richard Scott (1965:262) would say, studying "human beings on the hoof." Specifically, the field study methodology to be introduced is intended to examine those most difficult of issues which range from the top of the hierarchy down through the various mid-levels and all the way down to the local schools. In this case, issues of policy formation (made at the top), execution (carried out at mid-levels), and implementation (see at the bottom).

The paper examines several issues which influence the inquiry process in Latin America, such as:

(1) examining the impact of historical traditions on contemporary management procedures.

(2) exploring concerns for ethics and academic colonialism.

(3) distinguishing between anthropological and sociological participant-observation field methods.

(4) gathering and analyzing data about complex ministries of education.

(5) exploring the task of Third World theory building.

Also, a basic assumption is made that whether studying management behavior or mating behavior, a cross cultural perspective is valid and useful because the researcher is sensitive to social and cultural patterns that might otherwise escape notice.

In attempting to mesh methodological approaches to management problems, the paper ignores the basic but important "how to" issues, such as how to interview respondents, observe social behavior, and analyze documents. Participant observation techniques as these are treated admirably elsewhere (cf. Junker, 1960; McCall and Simmons, 1969; Denzin, 1978). Also, for better or worse, the paper draws heavily on my own field study experiences as I developed and practiced this methodological form over the years in the Ministries of Education in Colombia and Venezuela.

An exploration of the colonial legacy is a useful starting point.

The Contemporary Ministry and the Colonial Legacy

All societies are the end products of their traditions, be that benefactor or victim. In Spanish America contemporary practices of management have their historical antecedents buried deep in the three centuries of Spanish colonial rule, which ended with the wars of liberation early in the 19th Century. I have argued elsewhere (Hanson, 1974a:199) that ". . . the organizational and administrative mechanisms of societal and institutional governance have never quite broken loose from the historic legacy of Spanish colonialism and that the needs of modernizing nations are basically being served by administrative dinosaurs."

Being cognizant of specific aspects of this colonial legacy are important because they not only can influence _what_ data are collected by field researchers but also _how_ and _where_ they are collected. Hence, the place to begin is usually an examination of the historical literature in search of societal patterns that might have carried through to play an important role in contemporary institutions.

Historical research on three interrelated subjects would be particularly fruitful: (a) law, (b) politics, and (c) particularlism. Cutting across these three areas is an enigmatic _dualism_, two parallel but interlocking systems of thought and deed which significantly influence practices of organization and administration. As will be noted, this dualism is seen in the simultaneous presence of the ideal and the real (Phelan, 1960; Cummings, 1973).

Rule of Law. In the modern bureaucracy, as well as the Spanish Colonial bureaucracy, a heavy emphasis is placed on drafting comprehensive bodies of rules covering almost every foreseeable contingency (Phelan, 1960:51). The objective was, and is, to require optimum levels of behavior and performance. The origin of that practice is that Old Spain inherited from the Roman Empire a conception of law which was based on a moral interpretation of life. Roman law was embedded in nature and reason and emphasized the ethical standards of Christianity. Emerging from this conception of law was an idealistic, and relatively unrealistic, portrait of how people should behave, with little emphasis given to how people do behave. Old Spain stedfastly carried this conception of law to the New World where it became the foundation and framework of organizational and administrative processes (Phelan, 1967; Potash, 1963).

Aspects of this dualism can be seen, for example, in both the historic royal hierarchy (Crown, Council of the Indies, viceroy, captain-general, governor, mayor) and the contemporary hierarchy (President, minister of education, vice minister, director of instruction, regional supervisor, district supervisor, school principal) which emphasize strict centralized authority and formal organizational control (Stewart, 1978). In practice, however, a decision-making pattern emerged which provided a degree of flexibility and local control. This is a noncompliance pattern that also has its origins in Roman law which stipulated that the sovereign could not intentionally do any injustice to his subjects (Phelan, 1960: 69).

The se acata pero no se cumple (I obey but do not execute) principle signifies the recognition of the king's legitimate, sovereign power to command, but at the same time withholding compliance until the situation is better clarified. This dualism value of obeying in an ideal sense but not complying in a real sense enables many public officials and citizens to consider themselves loyal to a distant hierarchical authority and its laws while at the same time ignoring the dictates of both. This aspect of the dualism has immense implications for all institutions, ranging from the enforcement of public policy to paying taxes to parking automobiles. In educational systems it permits such incongruences as requiring compulsory education, but not providing sufficient schools, resources, or equipment; requiring the hiring of specifically qualified teachers, but overlooking the rules in favor of political party needs; or delegating a task of curricular change, but not delegating the authority to make that change (Paulston, 1971:136).

An extract of the legal emphasis is the process of standardization. The historic intent was for the populace to adjust its actions to a more nearly perfect set of standards reflecting the ideal rather than adjusting to specific regional or local requirements. Also, standardization facilitated processes of centralized control.

Standardization can affect the educational system in many unintended ways, such as instances I encountered where a classroom experiment stipulated in the centralized curriculum required a microscope and no such instrument could be found in any school in the entire city; or a secondary school principal who was unable to permit his teachers qualified in the "new math" techniques to use that approach because the MOE had not yet approved them for the entire nation; or the teachers in a one room jungle school for Indians having to use the curricular materials drafted for urban school settings (Hanson, 1970a; Hanson, 1976).

On the other hand, a standardized curriculum can often elevate the level of instruction by providing many of the teachers with an outline for teaching which is much more comprehensive and sophisticated than anything they could produce for themselves.

Personalism. The ideal/real dualism can also be seen in the historical and contemporary context when examining the formal institutional roles and relationships which are supposed to govern professional activities. Frequently, informal personal bonds of friendship and loyalty will emerge to become a dominant force behind management actions. David Blank (1973:56) observes that:

> Venezuelans tend to act for the advancement and defense of the interests of their immediate, primary group relationships--kinship, compadrazgo (ritual co-parenthood), friendship, or patron-clientelism--rather than for some abstract concept of the common good. Relationships among members of these intimate associations are characterized by mutual trust, mutual aid, and courtesy. The world outside of personal relationships tends to be viewed with apprehension and distrust. In this vast, chaotic world, Venezuelans seek out individuals with whom they have the basis for developing personal relationships and, thereby, the right to make special claims for preference and protection. If relatives cannot be found, relatives of relatives will do--or even an aquaintance from the home town or district.

Communication processes reflect these "personalism" tendencies. Historically, Moreno (1967:316) points out, subjects of the King were required to transmit messages through prescribed hierarchical channels. However, "any colonial subjects or institutions desiring to approach the Crown could do so as long as they would invoke religion or justice in their appeal." An appeal for justice covers almost everything imaginable, therefore circumventing the hierarchy and going straight to the source of power at the top became, as it is today, a common practice.

Sitting in the waiting chambers of a top ministry official today and watching, say, a campesino delegation, a trio of Catholic teaching sisters, a school principal from a distant city, (and possibly even a researcher) patiently waiting their turn to present a petition, request a favor, or sell some goods, one gets the impression that the process of requesting personal intervention probably hasn't changed much since the colonial period (cf. Borah, 1963:394). By receiving these people directly, the official at times can speed up the decision-making process and even respond to an injustice. He also obtains direct information on what is going on in the interior as well as builds up his personal base of power and influence network.

Politics. During the colonial period, public institutions in the New and Old Worlds operated in the service of the Crown. In its desire to insure continuing strong bonds of political loyalty and economic support from the colonies to Spain, the King's Council of the Indies established a strategy of placing native born Spaniards in the highest positions of governmental power and influence in the vice royalties and regional audiencias (Burkholder and Chandler, 1972; Campbell, 1972).

With the emergence of independent nations, Latin American political neutrality in public institutions of government, such as ministries of education, has never been a given condition--even though formal law might state it as such. Now unlike the Crown appointing native-born Spaniards to positions of power, ministers of education are usually careful to appoint only loyal party members or hombres de confianza to the higher levels of office. The unfortunate consequence of this approach is that the educational institution is an extension of the political institution, and therefore educational decisions are frequently made for good political rather than academic reasons (Paulston, 1971:108-114).

In Colombia, for example, I commonly encountered states where the secretaries of education were doctors, lawyers, or businessmen seeking to launch a political career. This ambition produced interesting results, often to the detriment of the state educational system. The jobs themselves were political appointments and the secretaries of education in the individual states seemed to know little about the pedagogical aspects of education or care about the policy requirements of the Ministry in Bogota.

Managing a large block of public money was a good means of developing a reputation within the political party structure, and hence a base of power. National funds earmarked for paying teachers' salaries would often get "confused" with state funds in the state budget and end up as politically visible construction projects instead of paying teachers. In a decade the teachers in individual states went on strike over 80 times in order to obtain unpaid salaries. Also, large numbers of teachers, and even non-teaching personnel, were frequently hired by state secretaries of education just before an election when no money existed in the budget to pay them. Certainly some states were much more politically irresponsible than others, but the overall effect of mixing education with politics has historically not served the schools well (Hanson, 1974b).

In short, these few illustrations of the ideal/real dualism found in law, personalism, and politics are not intended to be all inclusive, but rather to signal their importance to the management setting. Also, the importance of doing a sound historical exploration before going into the field. I should also point out that the dysfunctional aspects identified are certainly not pervasive. Usually, the individuals found at the various levels of the educational institutions are hard working and dedicated to the task of resolving difficult problems with limited resources.

The next section of this paper turns to ethical considerations surrounding the conduct of a field study on foreign soil.

Issues of Ethics and Academic Colonialism

"The successful field researcher," Richard Scott (1965:265) reminds us, "must satisfy the demands of at least two groups: those of his scientific colleagues and those of the subject group and groups." For the former the researcher must consider the importance of an increment of knowledge, the significance of the research questions, and the niceties of methodology. For the latter the researcher must respond to the norms governing the conduct of social scientists as well as the norms governing the subject group. Also, any researcher on foreign soil has special obligations, and one of them is the avoidance of academic colonialism.

Certainly obtaining institutional permission is central to a study. All ministries of education have a research office, such as ICOLPE in Colombia and EDUPLAN in Venezuela, which authorizes such activity. Universities can also provide a research base and legitimize activities of a foreign researcher as part of their own scholarly endeavors. The uninvited and unauthorized foreign researcher treads on quicksand and can place in peril the name, effort, and goodwill of all the rest.

Obtaining permission from individual respondents is also essential. As Diener and Crandall (1978:104-105) point out:

> Field researchers must be aware both of the subjects' definition of privacy and of how the published materials may affect the lives of those studied. Ethical precautions such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and the use of pseudonyms are often helpful, but even when these are employed, the investigator should evaluate the possible effects of research publication and be convinced that the subject population's rights and welfare are sufficiently protected.

Latin American nations are not unmindful to the fact that "knowledge is power," and ever heightening level of tension revolves around concerns of academic colonialism--the exportation of information (Altbach and Kelly, 1978). Kalman Silvert (1966:154) reports on an interesting case where a distinguished American professor who had conducted a study with a local UNESCO agency in Chile was actually asked to leave his IBM cards and code books behind and he refused ". . . clearly wanting to publish before letting anyone else in on his act." Not surprisingly, "data banditos" are not a welcome lot.

In addition, as a condition of entry researchers are now frequently required to show how the subject population will benefit. The long range of goals of basic research are often not enough in the face of immediate problems demanding relief, and the demands for practical feedback can be compelling and cast with ethical overtones. As an illustration in the cross cultural setting, in this case with American Indians, Deloria (reported in Diener and Crandall, 1978:114) defiantly resolves "We should not be objects of observation for those who do nothing to help us . . . Why should we continue to provide private zoos for anthropologists? Why should tribes have to compete with scholars for funds, when their scholarly productions are so useless and irrelevant to life?"

No discussion of research ethics in Latin America, or any other developing area, would be complete without introducing the infamous Project Camelot (Horowitz, 1967). "To an Englishman," Silvert (1977: 131) observes, "Camelot is the site of medieval romance. To an American, the name suggests the Tousand Days of Kennedy's political dash and derring-do. To a Latin American, it means 'sociological espionage.'"

In the early 1960s as the U.S. military became increasingly involved in the so-called "wars of liberation" of Southeast Asia, fears began to surface signaling the possibility that such a situation could menacingly develop in our own "back yard" of Latin America, as was already seen by many as the case in Cuba. In 1964 the Special Operations Research Office of American University received a $6,000,000 grant from the Department of the Army to launch a major multi-national study.

The objective of the study was to identify the conditions that could lead to revolutionary disruptions and internal warfare in developing nations. Several Latin American countries would be subjects of the study which would be multi-disciplinary, cutting across all types of national institutions, using quantitative, qualitative, and historical methodologies. The analysis would point toward the generation of prescriptive techniques for containing or channeling the emerging social, political, and economic forces that could lead toward revolutionary profiles inconsistent with the interests of the United States.

The nature of the funding was disguised to Latin Americans, and the collaboration of Chilean social scientists was solicited under false pretenses. When the true nature of the unclassified project became known, it became entangled with the American military intervention in the Dominican Republic which occurred about that time and, to put it mildly, the shit hit the fan. Project Camelot along with many other unrelated research projects were cancelled, venomous attacks were launched against American academia as well as the U.S. government, investigations were carried out in both houses of the U.S. Congress as well as in the Chilean Congress.

Looking back at the uncovering of Camelot, Silvert (1966:144) observes, "The extremely noisy debacle which ensued almost immediately cannot be explained in the narrow terms of a few bungling individuals or even of misguided policy; the ground was well prepared by the ethical incomprehension, cavalier attitudes, and tolerance of ignorance manifested by American universities and scholars for many years." American scholars then became concerned about issues of academic ethics while Latin Americans became concerned about the sovereignty of governments.

The next section of this paper turns toward an examination of two types of field research methodology.

Sustained versus Transitory Field Methods

Given the structural complexities of Latin American ministries of education as well as the variety of policy related issues to identify and sort out, the so-called sustained and transitory approaches to field research are important and useful. In reality, the two approaches are on a continuum with no hard and fast lines separating them. Richard Scott (1965:271) writes that:

> . . . researchers interested in exploring or describing a particular situation in depth, or in directly observing the types and patterning of activities and interactions of a limited group of subjects are better advised to engage in sustained interactions with the subject group under study. Researchers desiring to test relations among a limited number of variables who are able to utilize reports of respondents on their attitudes and behavior had best plan to collect their data [with a transitory method] from a larger number of subjects or subject groups, and so can spend only a limited amount of time with each.

Along with desired intensiveness of interaction, depth of understanding, breadth of scope, size of subject population, and time available, the important issue of legitimization of presence varies on the sustained--transitory continuum. Legitimacy of presence relates to the willingness of respondents to provide essential data and the authenticity of that data. Transitory field research must usually rely on legitimacy established by, for example, formal credentials, statements of official approval, researcher reputation, reputation of the researcher's home university, and local sponsorship. Legitimacy for a sustained field research approach must usually be established in an informal manner based on trust and confidence generated through the interpersonal relationship of researcher and respondents.

Strictly speaking, the sustained and transitory approaches to field research are independent of any particular academic discipline. However, as the next section will point out, the sustained method lends itself better to the type of research questions and systems of explanation utilized by anthropologists, and the transitory approach lends itself better to the work of sociologists.

Anthropological and Sociological Field Studies

Anthropology is traditionally defined as the science of man, and cultural anthropology deals with the behaviors of people as influenced by their culture. Sociology is traditionally defined as the science of society, and it examines formal and informal social behavior in groups, institutions, and societies.

Certainly, degrees of overlap exist between the two academic disciplines, as they do between all social science disciplines, because each is tied to the notion that human behaviors are significantly influenced by the settings in which they occur. However, basic differences in the disciplines tend to be found in the type of research questions asked, the target populations selected for study, and the systems of explanation employed in the analysis.

Turning to the anthropological orientation, Geertz (1973:5) writes that "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning." These "webs of culture" in a society incorporate "non-economic" sociological and psychological factors as social values, psychological needs, religious constraints, class stratifications, and ethnic animosities which influence national development even when economic conditions are favorable for systematic capital accumulation. "Structural conditions" writes Lipset (1967:3), "make development possible; cultural factors determine whether the possibility becomes an actuality."

Anthropological research begins with systematic, objective observations and recordings of behaviors in their natural settings. Controls or interventions by the researchers, therefore, are stringently avoided.

An ethnography, Wolcott (1975:112) observes, is the science of cultural description and is literally an anthropologists picture of the way of life of some human group. One intention of this "picture" is to convey a sense of what it is like to be a member of the group studied and to know and appreciate the network of expectations, constraints, and facilitators to thought and deed. To portray, in other words, what it is like to walk in someone else's shoes.

Wolcott (1975:113) writes that "One of the most satisfying aspects of this traditional approach is that one is free to discover what the problem is rather than obliged to pursue inquiry into a predetermined problem that may in fact exist only in the mind of the investigator." While the ethnographer may explore either or both the informal (cf. Redfield, 1943) or formal (cf. Horst and McLelland, 1968) aspects of education, a central aspect is usually to identify and bring to the surface those critical behavioral patterns that have special significance for the actions of the target system. For example, in a study (Hanson,

1970) of the consequences at the local school level derived from decision-making power concentrated at the top levels of the MOE in Caracas, I found three significant problem patterns: (1) decision time lag, school principals usually waited from six to twelve months for action to be taken on their important requests; (2) system rigidity, innovations could not be introduced at the local level, and (3) indifferent attitudes, brought about by a sense of "psychological distance" from the centers of power.

In looking to differentiate anthropological research from other disciplinary forms, Singleton (1974:34) writes:

> The holistic nature of anthropological research stands in contrast to what might be called the analytic perspectives of psychology and sociology. Any naturally significant human group is seen as a system of interrelated elements which constitute the underlying structure of the phenomena to be observed rather than as a tangle of related variables which can be sifted out and associated in lawlike regularities for all human situations. Variables can be defined only after observation and usually form a statement of system characteristics or taxonomy.

Although "the search for lawlike regularities" will be taken up later in a section on theory building, characteristically sociologists will engage in a field study with less than a holistic approach. The intent, rather, is to explore critical variables within the social system and analyze them in terms of their contribution to the system as a whole or in relationship to one another. These variables are often selected in advance because they are known to be critical to the operation of any organization, such as communication patterns, sources of power, reward systems, upward mobility expectations, decision-making processes, and the like. These variables may well be ordered in a conceptual framework because, as Blau and Scott (1962:8-9) observe, ". . . scientific research must be guided by a theoretical framework, that is, a system of interrelated concepts that suggest theoretically fruitful lines of empirical investigation."

In addition, sociologists often employ sample surveys as instruments for discerning the characteristics of members of organizations (cf. Solari, 1967). However, Blau and Scott (1962:18) stress that sample surveys are not well suited for studies of organizational structure because ". . . the selection of independent cases is achieved at the cost of tearing individuals from the social matrix in which they are embedded." A social structure is represented in the network of relations between individuals and groups, ". . . the very core of the study of social organization" (p. 11). The fabric of organizational structure to a sociologist, then, is like the fabric of social culture to an anthropologist. Each has a context which lends significant understanding to the behavior encountered within, and the field study approach helps preserve rather than atomize that context.

When examining educational issues, anthropologists will typically concentrate their study at the local level, such as the community or the school, and examine the linkages between observed behavior and cultural transmission (cf. Calhoun and Ianni, 1976). However, as Foley (1977:321) observes:

> Anthropologists "study up" (from the village), but not terribly far up, in either a theoretical or a descriptive sense. Few studies actually say enough about the overall formal school system, its organizational structure, and national socio-political context to make justments about its total institutional function. The studies are not "educationist" enough to generate data

> for detailed comparisons between formal curriculum, teacher certification, pedagogical methods, and a host of questions studied in educational foundations.

On the issues of "studying up" as well as "out," the sociological and anthropological approaches to field studies will usually part company. As the field study moves beyond the local level and expands up the hierarchy as well as into diverse subunits of a complex organization, the possibility of retaining the characteristics of "holism" diminishes and the attributes of culture can become shrouded by such things as technical training, professionalism, and formally prescribed procedures and regulations.

Having to move up and around the formal hierarchy of a complex organization, such as a ministry of education, is not a limiting factor to the sociological field researcher because the requirements of holism and culture take a back seat to the pursuit of the identification, description, analysis, and attachment of meaning to critical organizational variables as, say, curricular change, policy formation, and administrative power. Such a pursuit can easily range from the local classroom to the office of the minister of education, by way of the budgeting, planning, and personnel departments of administration.

Gathering Data in the Field

Field studies are frequently criticized as being little more than impressionistic journalism dotted with stories and anecdotes of local color and events. As is the case with all methodologies, including quantitative approaches, the quality of the product is going to be no better than the quality of the researcher and the care he or she takes with the work. The field study researcher is particularly vulnerable because the data are not fully visible and cannot be returned to as is often the case with a matrix of numbers. In order to be creditable, the field researcher must practice what Margaret Mead calls "disciplined subjectivity."

The researcher must not only record what happens but also who, where, and when; and in the analysis _why_ it happened and to _what consequence_ for the system. Numerous research tools are available to this end, such as key-informant interviewing, biographical studies, archive searchers, oral histories, questionnaires, rating and rankings, projective techniques, structured interviews, and participant-observation. Types of useful printed data can be official publications, private correspondence, minutes of meetings, compilations of figures, biographies, diaries kept by participants, formal charters, legal publications, codes of rules, and the like.

The participant-observer approach is often the principal tool of the field researcher. As Becker (1970:399) comments:

> Sociologists usually use [the participant observation] method when they are especially interested in understanding a particular organization or substantive problem rather than demonstrating relations between abstractly defined variables. They attempt to make their research theoretically meaningful, but they assume they do not know enough about the organization a priori to identify relevant problems and hypotheses and that they must discover these in the course of the research.

Lutz and Iannaccone (1969:108) identify three participant-observer stances a researcher might take, each with advantages and disadvantages.

1. The participant as an observer (owning group membership).

2. The observer as a limited participant (allowed group membership).

3. The observer as a non-participant (without group membership).

In addition, for the sociologist, or anyone using the <u>transitory</u> methodology, the <u>formal</u> aspects of the organization become a significant asset. The researcher does not have to look for the organization or the behaviors of specific people because they are usually at a definite place at a specific time. The researcher can attend scheduled meetings, establish interviews as specified hours of work in specific locations, track the history of the organization through a local library of a MOE, and examine written documents such as budgets, goal statements, and performance measures.

In contrast, the anthropologist, or anyone following a <u>sustained</u> research methodology, must hang around the local site mapping the holistic picture and be constantly on the alert for those unplanned dramatic or subtle shifts in behavior that can be so important in developing a system of explanation.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

Ideally, field study methodology leads from <u>description</u> to <u>analysis</u> to <u>explanation</u>; in other words, from <u>what</u> is happening to <u>why</u>. The accurate description of an event or condition, however, does not always lead to an accurate analysis and explanation. Such is the case whether one is describing the weather or political constraints to ministry policy making. Illustrating this point, Turner (1977:29) points out that an accurate description of the weather as "cool and cloudy" does not lead directly to any explanation of the forces that actually shape such weather. Alternate explanations for accurate descriptions can and do emerge such as witchcraft, the relative tranquillity of the gods, or the position of the planets. The analysis and explanation can most effectively be carried out when based on an underlying conceptual framework, such as, in this case, the weather cycle of sun, evaporation, wind, and rain.

The guiding conceptual scheme, however, should be subject to change as indeed is the analysis and explanation given to the data. As Becker (1970:400) points out:

> The first thing we note about participant observation research is that analysis is carried on sequentially, important parts of the analysis being made while the researcher is still gathering his data. This has two obvious consequences: Further data gathering takes its direction from provisional analyses; and the amount and kind of provisional analysis carried on is limited by the exigencies of the field work situation, so that final comprehensive analyses may not be possible until the field work is completed.

As an illustration, I once began gathering data in Colombia looking for a publicly announced decentralization movement which was supposed to be going on in the Ministry of Education. At interim levels of the study, when I began to ask questions of my data, I began to realize that a very subtle and clever movement toward centralization of power rather than decentralization was actually taking place. I then had to revise my interview schedule as well as the guiding conceptual scheme.

In moving from data toward explanation, the researcher's image of reality and not reality itself is represented in the analysis. Such representation can fall on a continuum with extremes ranging from particularizing to generalizing analysis. Lipset et al., (1970:127) write:

> (a) Description and explanation of the single case provide information concerning its present state, and the dynamics through which it continues as it does. This may be called a particularizing analysis.

(b) The development of empirical generalizations or theory through the analysis of the single case, using it not to discover anything about it as a system but as an empirical basis either for generalization or theory construction. This may be called generalizing analysis.

The complexity and extent of the scheme of analysis, according to Parsons and Shils, (1951:47-52) can take place on at least three levels, with a fourth added by Denzin (1978:48).

(1) Ad Hoc Classificatory Systems: The first type consists of more or less arbitrary categories for purposes of organizing and summarizing data. The categories facilitate description, but not explanation. For example, a description of operations in a ministry of education might be broken down into functional categories of planning, personnel, finance, and supervision.

(2) Categorical Systems or Taxonomies: The second type of analysis is formed to organize the data so that the relationships and interdependence between categories or variables become visible. The taxonomy has limited explanatory powers, and mainly serves to call attention to the importance of a network of possible relationships and suggest fruitful lines of continued exploration. For example, in a study on management reform in the Venezuelan ministry of education (Hanson, 1975), I analyzed the data in terms of a taxonomy of three sequential stages of events that dealt with the reallocation of power (as well as constraints to that reallocation) as it shifted from the top levels to the lower levels of the hierarchy.

Along with the analytical context of discovering and examining the relationships between categories is an approach which compares the categories looking for similarities and differences. In this context can be found the popular (or perhaps unpopular) "comparative education" approach (Koehl, 1977). For example, a comparative approach might call for the study of the actual management implementation of an instructional innovation as compared with the original plans for implementation. The differences between the "is" and the "should be" are then explained in terms of organizational concepts as, say, communication, power, tension, expectations, and the like. Comparisons are important because they can highlight patterns of similarity and differences, and they can range from comparisons between nations to comparisons between individuals (Hanson, 1970b).

(3) Conceptual Frameworks (see Denzin, 1978:49): A conceptual framework stands above a taxonomy in analytical strength. It represents the identification of the interrelationships between variables and proposes an explanation for a large amount of data. A conceptual framework can be used to initiate research, guide the data gathering, and, as revised by the data, be the end product--along with the propositions or hypotheses it spawns.

Although verification studies utilizing and producing conceptual frameworks are always of varying quality, the objective is to work toward continued refinement through empirical examination until the end result is as close to isomorphic with reality as possible. Model building and testing fall within this context, and such conceptual tools can be very helpful in the explanation of critical issues as, say, decision-making or communication networking in complex ministries of education. Denzin (1978:50) writes that "Much of what now passes as theory in sociology is really conceptual frameworks that systematically direct empirical and theoretical activity around a core set of problems . . . Because of this directive function, the conceptual framework offers the best hope for development of systematic theory."

The final analytical forms identified by Parsons and Shils are theoretical systems, and they will be treated in the next section of the paper.

Third World Theory Building

Rather than examine localized problems and settings, many researchers have stressed the necessity of developing generalizable systems of explanation when dealing with issues of modernization in the Third World (cf. La Belle and Verhine, 1975; Paulston, 1977). Blau and Scott (1962:8-9) define theory as a ". . . set of interrelated variable generalizations that account for and predict the empirical phenomena that can be observed." Theory, then, provides for the organization of descriptive data, establishes a system of explanation, and creates the basis of prediction of events yet to occur. Generalizations drawn from empirical-theoretical systems (Parsons and Shils, 1951:51) would have explanatory powers that could, within limits, transcend national boundaries and enlighten the cause and effect relationships within the various development stages in Third World nations.

Theory-based generalizations treating relationships between variables at all levels of ministry organization and administration would be extremely enlightening, such as relationships between personalism and promotion, risk taking behavior and job stability, merit pay and productivity, political party politics and educational policy formation, centralized curricular control and local instructional creativity, community involvement and local school decision-making. The reasoning goes that a body of theoretical generalizations on management would give national leaders some academic sense of the probable consequences of following specific policies, and thus permit more reasoned interventions in, and stimulations of, the development process.

However, trying to build Third World theory directly from the conclusions of a qualitative (and therefore limited) field study can be as dangerous and unenlightening as trying to build theory directly from a quantitative hypothesis testing study. Wilson (1977:250) observes that quantitative researchers risk examining and attaching great importance to variables that are basically irrelevant in developing nations. In addition, Charters (1967:13) warns that a study which targets on and perhaps even supports completely pre-stated hypotheses with nothing left over provides little opportunity to extend understanding beyond that narrow frame.

In the business of theory building, therefore, the qualitative field study and the quantitative hypothesis testing study need one another. The field study serves to identify those critical system variables that appear to significantly influence organizational activities. The contribution of a field study, then, is to surface a reality-based set of assumptions and critical system variables reflecting on the operation of people, processes, and programs. The variables drawn from the analysis are finally cast into the form of hypotheses, or at least a model from which hypotheses can be readily drawn. In short, as Lutz and Iannaccone (1969:133) stress, the contribution of a field study is producing hypotheses and not testing them. Given the reality-based grounding of these hypotheses, verification studies using quantitative techniques are then necessary to complete (or at least continue) the process of theory building.

Quantitative measures, however, by no means have a lock on the theory building process. Certainly historical examinations of cause and effect relationships are of great importance (cf. Silvert, 1977: 205-226). Also, anthropologists and sociologists make effective use of comparative studies. Redfield (1941), for example, studied four Yucatan communities--peasant village, tribal village, city and town--along a folk to urban continuum. His objective was "to do two different things at once: to summarize a great many particular facts about a particular people at a certain time and also to declare or suggest certain notions about the nature of society and culture" (p. ix).

The next stage of the paper turns to some suggested methodological aspects intended to facilitate the field work.

In the Field

After the in-country arrival the immediate question becomes, how and where does one begin the research in a large complex ministry? The issue of a starting point is particularly critical for a study which ranges from the top echelons in the hierarchy where the policy is formed all the way to the bottom where it is implemented.

Unfortunately, many researchers examining expansive issues of policy formation and execution tend to start at the top and stay at the top. They fall victim to a certain seductive rationale which suggests that the top people have the best information and can quickly cut through the ambiguities and confusion to give a clear, cogent, and informed diagnosis of the research issues. Certainly walking the halls of government and interviewing leaders with immense power can be an exhilarating experience and lead one to believe that he or she is obtaining data of the highest quality.

Perhaps such data will be of such quality, but there are at least three reasons why that might not be the case. First, as discussed earlier, there is the natural tendency in the Latin American culture to speak within the framework of the ideal instead of the real. Public information documents are also cast in this light and can therefore be misleading. Second, there is a natural tendency in organizations anywhere toward what Smith and Keith (1971:47) call the "cloaking of organizational realities." That is, putting on a "public face" that represents an appropriate image to the various constituencies (including researchers).

Third, the highly placed officials simply may not have good information. According to Crozier (1964:196), top people in a highly centralized system have little personal knowledge of conditions in the field and must rely on information provided by subordinates. The top men, Crozier argues, tend to be located in a "blind spot." This blind spot is reinforced by what Katz and Kahn (1978:453) call "communication filtering." That is, the natural tendency in tall hierarchical organizations for officials at the differing levels to temper any commentary in upwardly moving messages that might reflect negatively on their own level of management.

My argument is that the researcher is best served by spending only enough time in the capital city to gather a few published documents for purposes of orientation on how the policy change should work, and then proceed directly to a local community far from the excesses of the capital city. The objective of starting at the local school site level is to closely examine the influence of the policy change as it has impacted on the local level. Such an approach calls for carrying out a sustained, ethnographic like, field study which carefully maps out and identifies the intended and unintended consequences of the policy as well as searching for those new organizational patterns that should be present (according to the documents) but for some reason can't be found in operation.

In Venezuela, for example, I once spent several weeks in a local school setting looking for the effects of a major organizational and administrative reform that had been initiated a few years earlier by the Ministry of Education. While I found the formal aspects of the reform in place, in terms of a revised structural design, new job titles, and improved office space, the critical aspects of management as well as teaching and learning patterns had changed very little.

In regard to that reform, I later found out that at the top and regional levels of the MOE, national and even international conferences had been held to elucidate the subject. Whereas at the local level, where the reform was to have its meaning, a poverty of information existed. The workshops that were to be held were often no more than a quick introduction conducted by local people with minimal background and training. Each school had received a single copy of a publication on the new policies and procedures, but I usually found it uncirculated and locked away in the principal's office.

In short, the lower down I was in the organizational hierarchy, the scarcer the information and understanding was, and therefore the more limited the capability to carry out the expectations and requirements of the reform. It could be argued that the tall hierarchical system of the MOE had become so accustomed over the decades to passing and processing information upward that it had never really succeeded in developing an effective downward means of communication. It should also be pointed out that the top MOE officials were basically unaware of the information distribution problem that existed.

After identifying at the local level those significant intended and unintended consequences of the policy change, the next task is one of moving up the hierarchy at several different points in the country. Most ministries of education in Latin American countries have a separate chain of authority extending from the bottom to the top in each administrative unit, such as the state or region. As a means of identifying national patterns emerging from new policies, the researcher can choose a selected number of separate chains of authority representing distinctive socio-economic sections of the country. (In Venezuela I moved up four out of a possible eight regions, and in Colombia five out of a possible 22 states.)

As well as looking for similarities and differences between regions, it is also important to identify supportive and nonsupportive patterned relationships between higher and lower hierarchical levels. In a

Venezuelan decentralization study, for example, I found that the MOE officials in Caracas were having a hard time breaking old habits. Much to the consternation of the regional officials with their newly vested powers and responsibilities, the higher MOE officials kept involving themselves directly in local level programs and thus disrupting the legitimate activities of the regional officials. Also, the top MOE officials were not at all adverse to pulling back delegated decision-making powers from regional officials when it seemed convenient to do so.

Certainly, the farther the researcher moves up the hierarchy, the more he or she has to shift from a sustained to a transitory methodology. Also, the higher one goes the more important it becomes to be well "sponsored." That is, taking advantage of the personalism aspects of management life by having someone who is part of the insider network making contacts and legitimizing the researcher as an hombre de confianza.

Once the researcher finally arrives in the capital city to begin gathering data at the high MOE levels (e.g., division heads as planning, personnel, finance, and instruction, or vice minister and minister), he or she will have a firm grasp of what the implementation of the policy looks like at the local and regional levels. Having such information and understanding, I have found, can influence an interview session with a ministry official in at least three important ways: (1) the researcher knows what questions to ask and can probe the reasoning behind specific MOE actions; (2) when the MOE official initiates discussion along the lines of what "should be" the researcher can recognize this framework and shift the dialogue to an exploration and explanation of what "is" happening, and (3) once the official realizes that the researcher has an unusually comprehensive understanding of key aspects of the subject, the "public face" is often dropped and replaced by a healthy give and take session.

Following these final interviews comes the laborious but often intriguing task of analyzing the data and constructing a system of explanation. That, of course, is the meaning of social science research.

Conclusion

In Third World countries a key to the course of nation building is the modernization of the organizational and administrative infrastructures which drive the development process. However, in order to intelligently improve upon these management mechanisms, we must first know considerably more than we do now about how they work (or don't work) and how they change (or don't change). In attempting to study such a large, complex instrument of government as a ministry of education, questions of research methodology must be addressed.

This paper explores some of the issues involved in using a participant-observer field research methodology in studying those major policy issues which reach from the top to the bottom of the MOE hierarchy. This paper stresses the importance of such activities as: (1) being sensitive to the subtleties of the ideal/real dualism, (2) responding to the Latin American concerns of academic colonialism, (3) beginning study at the bottom of the hierarchy (local school level) and working upwards, (4) shifting from a sustained to a transitory methodology as the researcher moves up the hierarchy, (5) looking for similarities and differences between selected regions or states in order to get closer to a national perspective, and (6) developing a framework of analysis and a system of explanation appropriate to the objectives of the research and the constraints of the methodology.

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