A SOCIAL BASIS OF EDUCATION

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THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY

PUBLISHERS : NEW YORK

PREFACE

THIS volume is addressed to educators, active and potential, in and out of school. In its preparation the method has been attempted which is advocated in its pages, viz., the application of intellectual materials to the human values which they are intended to conserve. It is, therefore, not a mere catalog of social and educational data. It is, rather, the presentation of a definite thesis, together with teaching devices intended to arouse (a) further study along lines of greatest individual interest, (b) free discussion of variant educational philosophies, and (c) interest in the vital problems of education to whose solution the principles formulated may contribute.

The devices employed, in the form of individual and group projects, are intended to replace the formal oral question method frequently resorted to in the effort to supplement the manifestly inadequate and impersonal lecture method.

With the expansion and differentiation of the fields of social psychology and educational sociology there is need, not for the mere multiplying of books, but for integrating into a philosophy of education all the principles that bear vitally upon conscious human improvement. To such integration, unhampered by subject-field terminology, and with a minimum sacrifice of orderliness or precision, this book aspires to contribute.

To Dr. Walter Robinson Smith for a careful reading of the manuscript and many constructive suggestions, and to Dean Henry Davidson Sheldon and Dr. Nelson F. Bossing for valuable criticisms, especial obligation is acknowledged. To the following publishers who have generously permitted the use of extended quotations grateful acknowledgment is here made, in addition to acknowledgments in individual footnotes: American Book Company, D. Appleton and Company, The Century Company, Doubleday, Doran and Company,

E. P. Dutton and Company, Ginn and Company, Harper and Brothers, D. C. Heath and Company, Henry Holt and Company, Houghton Mifflin Company, Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, Longmans, Green and Company, The Macmillan Company, W. W. Norton and Company, Charles Scribner's Sons, University of Chicago Press, National Education Association, *The Survey,* and the *Journal of Educational Sociology.*

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PART I

THE GOAL OF EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Educational practice is based on individual psychology. Furthermore, psychology in recent years has been dealing with the nervous system until it has tended to become a mere study of physiology; especially is this true of educational psychology. Without raising a question as to the soundness of the neural explanation of learning, one is easily within the truth in asserting that the total effect has been individualistic in emphasis. By stressing the physical basis of learning, attention has been so concentrated upon the processes in the *individual* as to divert it almost completely from the *social factors* involved in learning. If learning involves a bond between stimulus and response in the individual, equally certain and far more significant is the fact that *both the stimulus and the response are social*. Every stimulus to learning contains at least some social element. In some cases the social element predominates. A child does not learn to read except by suggestion or imitation or specific instruction from other *persons*. He does not learn to add unless motivated by some definite need of mathematical operations or by some strong inducement from a teacher backed by community, family, and state. A child does not learn to write without similar motive from the school or a desire to communicate with other persons. Even the love of art and music will develop but little apart from association with others who love art and music. For all practical purposes it may be said that the stimulus for learning is essentially social.

No less is it true that the outcomes of learning are social in so far as they are significant. Skills that a child at play acquires early find their significance in the experience of playing with other children. The mastery of arithmetic and penmanship has meaning only in so far as it serves social needs; and even

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the love of art and music, individual as it seems, is altogether more significant when socially expressed than in isolation.

These two vital facts,—that the motive and the outcome of learning are essentially social,—are not explicitly denied in the typical courses for the training of teachers; but they are so little emphasized, so completely submerged by the emphasis on the individual processes that the outcome is essentially individualistic. Much of the practice in the schools is seriously lacking in social emphasis.

If education is to be efficient, it is as important that the teacher recognize the social nature of the laws of learning as that he recognize their physical nature. The 'law of use or repetition' is seldom operative apart from group motivation. There are, of course, some rhythmic activities of small children in which repetition occurs; but, on the whole, learning in or out of school grows out of some group need.

The 'law of effect' is manifestly most commonly illustrated by social satisfactions. What form of emotional strengthening of learning bonds is as common as approval? How many forms it takes in home and school! How subtly it occurs in almost every experience of an active child! The suppression of communication still persists in most schools. Evidently this particular form of social learning is unappreciated. Coöperation between pupils is stigmatized and penalized. Isolation is still the rule in mastering skills and knowledge. Abstract learning rather than social adjustment is rewarded.

The testing movement which has become so dominant a part of modern education has also contributed to the false emphasis upon the individual in learning. Here again there is no denial of the social implications of individual differences; many valuable social outcomes have sprung from the testing program; but emphasis has been placed upon the individual's capacity rather than upon his relationships, and many educators concentrate their attention upon the characteristics of the individual instead of the total social situation.

Especially is this illustrated by the widespread movement to exclude from college all whose I.Q.'s fall below a very selective standard. That a problem is faced by the colleges

cannot be denied; but that society would profit by appropriate collegiate training for the lower three-fourths of its youth has not yet been fully disproved. High schools have apparently rendered a great service during the very period when their standards of scholarship have been lowered by the incoming throng. Possibly increased emphasis on the social contributions of education would lead to a readjustment of content and method in both high school and college; this would contribute greatly to the social weal.

The need is not for a substitution of one truth for another, but for a redistribution of emphasis. In all its essential factors education is social just as surely as it is individual, and far more significantly. This criticism of present emphasis is not a denial of progress toward social goals. Indeed, the progress has been decidedly heartening during at least a decade, and it is gaining momentum and intensity; but *the service of sociology to education will not be fully realized until, in the judgments, the habits, and the attitudes of every teacher and every parent, the significance of the social aspects of education holds an equal place with that of its individual aspects*. It is in the hope of stimulating, on the part of educators, in school and out, increased emphasis on the *social outcomes of education,* that the author has prepared this treatise.

The book is frankly an exposition of a definite philosophy of education. It is not primarily a summary of data and interpretations in the field of educational sociology. It is an exposition of the thesis that *education can serve its social purpose only by consciously cultivating social interests and motives*. Society's stake in the attitudes which a child acquires is even greater than in the skills and concepts he gains.

This thesis differs in emphasis rather than in principle from that expressed or implied in many of the current treatises on educational sociology. Yet the practical effect of the shift of emphasis from knowledge and skill to attitude,—from the intellectual to the affective aspect of mental life,—is more significant than many a conflict of principle.

While setting forth a philosophy of education, the book attempts to present (either by explicit statement, or by means

of references to sources) the more significant contemporary views of the problem, regardless of their support or criticism of the author's thesis.

There are three major aspects of education to which sociology can make significant contribution.

First, sociology can help to clarify the *aims* of education. There are those who maintain that this is the one major problem of educational sociology.[1] Few would deny that it is at least one of its chief problems. In the very nature of the case, the determination of ultimate aims of education is dependent on a critical and comprehensive knowledge of social processes and values.

Psychology has nothing to say about the objectives of society. The laws of learning are the same whether one is seeking to train saint or sinner.[2] Skills are acquired in the same way whether for construction or destruction. Memory depends upon the same laws whether the content be truth or falsehood. The law of effect holds good whether the satisfactions that fix habits are approved or disapproved by society and whether the habits are beneficial or harmful.

Nor can the aims of education be determined by inductive analysis of society as it exists. Samplings of newspapers and magazines and political party platforms may furnish a basis for curricula which will initiate the child into society as it is, but experiences so determined may not initiate him into the sort of society that ought to be; and the difference in results attained will depend significantly on whether selections be made from the Chicago *Tribune* or the Emporia *Gazette,* the *American Mercury* or the *Atlantic Monthly,* from dominant parties or protest parties.

The aims of education depend upon social needs and social goods. These are values, not things. They require subjective evaluation. Insight alone can determine whether a change in the social order will prove beneficial or harmful. Moral judg-

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[1] See First Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Educational Sociology (a bibliography of Educational Sociology. Annotations indicate the positions of various authors relative to the task of the educational sociologist).

[2] Bagley, W. C., *Educative Process,* Macmillan, ch. 3.

ment, not cross-sections of society, must indicate goals. Insight is no mystic power that sees truth other than through the senses; rather, it is a power which depends upon the mass and organization of past experiences. It is the outcome of apperceptive background, an alert imagination, and a cultivation of the highest social appreciations. It is not synonymous with high intelligence alone. It involves a comprehensive knowledge of social data and a sympathetic interest in social well-being.

The specialist in other fields is not justified in drawing hasty conclusions based upon incidental attention to social values. Equations neither indicate nor corroborate values. Of course, no one is in a position to speak with authority; but those who discover the essence of the highest social values will gradually find their judgments approved by an increasing number of their fellows. The task of sociology is to discover these social values and to point them out to the educational world. Once ultimate values are accepted, it is then the task of the analyst, the statistician, and the psychologist to determine what intermediate goals must be synthesized in order to produce the desired outcome.

The second contribution of sociology to education consists of just this analysis of *means* and materials which will help attain the approved aim. In what directions do various social forces tend? Which are appropriate for one situation and which for another? The laws of social change and the process of social control have a very direct bearing upon education.

School buildings and equipment are factors in education. Society is concerned to know the influence of this material equipment upon the social product. Organization of the school is a social force. Is the 6-3-3 plan better than the 8-4 plan? Will the junior college contribute to the largest social good? What are the effects of retardation? of homogeneous grouping? of arbitrary discipline? What sort of curriculum will best conserve the accepted aims?

The service of sociology to education in this second phase —that of indicating means and materials—consists chiefly of selecting curriculum content. The selection of the curriculum

is not a determination of some single set of materials; it is a selection, not of *the* curriculum, but of varying curricula for divergent social needs.

The third contribution of sociology to education is the determination of *methods* in the light of social goals. This problem of method is also very closely allied with the determination of means. Indeed, the two merge at many points. Primarily the problem of method is the task of experimental psychology; yet if psychology ignores the influence of social agencies, sociology is under obligation to revise the methods proposed. A series of words may constitute a stimulus; yet the very same words if spoken in the presence of a group, may set up an altogether different response from that which will follow if these words are spoken in private conference. Psychologically the stimuli are the same in the two cases; sociologically they are diametrically opposite. The awarding of a medal to one who has performed some worthy act may mean but little if sent by mail, but a very great deal if presented in the presence of others. Since every learning situation is essentially social, method cannot be determined finally by the psychologist alone. Sociology is called upon to make a very definite and significant contribution.

The clarifying of methods is not limited to the work of the classroom teacher nor to classroom situations. Society is concerned not with the machinery of education, but with its outcome. Methods, therefore, from the social point of view include the handling of extra curricular activities, the administration of discipline, the supervision of pupil government, the honor system, and the stimulation of all activities that modify the social tendencies of the pupil.

A fourth contribution of sociology to education is in a sense an aspect of the first. The determination of aims carries with it an important corollary. Aims at every stage are tentative— at least the relative emphasis on certain phases of aims is bound to vary under social changes. It is therefore important that the means of continued analysis be determined along with the aims at any stage in social development. Society is not static; education is not static; hence the deduction that

aims must vary with social change. Sociology, then, should contribute means of progressive analysis of aims at the same time and as a corollary to the discovery of the present aims. To this task Part I of the volume is devoted.

If aims of education are to be determined, means discovered, and methods clarified, it is necessary to understand the nature of the child who is to be educated and also to understand the processes by which he responds to educational effort. This is essentially a psychological task. The findings of the specialist in this field must be accepted with the clear recognition that the techniques of the sociologist are not adequate to determine psychological laws. To these pertinent problems of social psychology Part II is devoted.

Much education occurs without intent on the part of either teacher or learner. Society is constantly educating its members. The agencies of society which contribute most largely to the education of children need to be studied. What are their dominant educational tendencies? To what degree can they be controlled by society? What contributions do they make which need not be duplicated by formal education? How do the processes of learning described in Part II function in informal education by society? These problems are treated in Part III. What is accomplished by these informal influences of society? What, then, is left as the necessary task of organized education? In other words, what is the specific task of the school? This calls for a fairly comprehensive treatment of the question of curriculum selection, method, and administration in relation to each essential aim. This is the task of Part IV.

Before approaching any one of these four problems, it is important to determine the principle upon which the solution of our problems is to be based. Not only is this a scientific age (which fact would be sufficient to demand scientific treatment), but science has already contributed to education to such an extent as to set certain precedents. The social sciences in particular have been strongly influenced by the demands for scientific procedure. There has been a little sting in the criticism from the field of natural science to the effect that

there are no social *sciences,*—that the social field is not amenable to scientific methods. In the effort to prove themselves scientific, some sociologists have resorted to a purely objective method of analysis.

What methods are justifiable in the face of the present progress of sicence in the social field? [3] Certainly all studies that hope to command the respect of thoughtful people must be scientific in spirit. Every conclusion which is offered must be subjected to every form of scientific tests; and no conclusion may be accepted which conflicts with demonstrated truths. The scientific spirit involves the gathering of all necessary data, the using of all data without selection, the basing of inferences on the actual data without prejudice, and the testing of conclusions in their various applications. Wishful thinking has no place in scientific procedure. Current fashions of thought, whether the outgrowth of ancient traditions or modern fads, are entitled to no weight.

There are some procedures which have won acceptance because of their seeming scientific nature, but which are seen on careful analysis to be fallacious. One such fallacy in social research is the failure accurately to evaluate data. The gathering of facts regarding current practices, as for example in methods of teaching English, may yield certain mathematical results. Out of 370 schools 93% may be found to follow a certain procedure in teaching literature. One school,—less than ⅓ of 1% of the total,—may follow a distinctly different method from all the others. Shall the method used by the 93% be set up as the *proper* way to teach English without reference to the quality of the product? Suppose that one school be Lincoln High School of Teachers College, New York, and that in it, more than in any other school studied, students be awakened to like good poetry and to dream dreams, many of which find expression not in poetry alone but also in civic life. Which, then, is the proper method of teaching English, that of the 93% or that of the ⅓ of 1%?

[3] For a penetrating discussion of this most vital question see Kilpatrick, W. H., "Hidden Philosophies," *Journal of Educational Sociology,* October, 1930.

The answer is so obvious as to leave no question; and the very illustration might be ridiculed as an absurdity were it not that there are being published so many studies in education in which precisely this fallacy is glaringly present. The correct interpretation of data is as important as the precise manipulation of data.

Another fallacy more common in the social field than in the physical, though not wholly absent there, is the assumption of specific truths as major premises. Often such assumptions are quite unconscious. They are a part of traditional thought. No matter how thorough may be the processes of gathering data, nor how logical the organization of such data, the conclusion resting upon a false major premise would, of course, be totally unreliable. A case in point is the testing movement in which careful scientific work has been done in constructing tests out of materials taken from Western culture. These tests have then been given to groups trained in altogether different cultures or in a status of social inferiority. Such groups have tested lower than the average American. The conclusion has been announced that the Nordic is superior to other races. Quite apart from the truth or error of the conclusion is the question of logic. The tests were standardized for large groups, all of whom had absorbed American culture. Do they prove anything except that the subjects have certain abilities to respond to similar situations in American culture?

Without offering a catalog of other fallacies—especially since this task has already been well performed,[4] one further serious fallacy deserves mention. It is the omission of part of the known data. Without doubt the purely philosophic approach to both psychology and sociology has led to crudely unscientific thinking and to untenable conclusions which might readily be corrected by analysis of objective data. The demand for complete recognition of all that inductive logic and objective data prove cannot be too strongly enforced. It is equally important, however, in the interests of permanent progress, that students in the social field shall not, in their enthusiasm

[4] Finney, R. L., *A Sociological Philosophy of Education*, Macmillan, ch. 1.

for correction of one form of this fallacy, fall into identically the same fallacy in a different form.

A part of the data in any study of social processes are values; and values are subjective. To attempt to be scientific while at the same time omitting subjective values is a most flagrantly unscientific procedure. There is nothing to contemplate regarding society which does not sustain some ultimate relation to human values. There is nothing else to justify or motivate a study of society. Values constitute the central consideration in the whole field of social science. Values are an essential part of the data in such a study. Human happiness, in whatever form or degree, is a datum of social experience. It has a bearing on all social facts. Any attempt to draw conclusions based upon objective data without taking into account the subjective values concerned is a clear case of drawing conclusions on the basis of only a part of the data. It is more; it is a case of arbitrarily rejecting a certain definitely *selected* part of the data. More seriously still, it is a rejection of that part of the data which many thinkers in this and every other age have considered the most important. To omit such data, merely because they cannot (as yet, at least) be reduced to comparable units, is no less unscientific than to omit data concerning glands or neurones.

If it is contended that the *inclusion* of subjective data, which have not been reduced to measurable units, is unscientific, it must be contended with equal emphasis that they are data which have a bearing on all social processes, and that therefore their *omission* is unscientific. Conclusions are not to be reached by computing the algebraic sum of omissions or of inclusions; but by recognizing that *all inferences are tentative on which subjective data have a bearing, whether these data are included or omitted*. The danger of fallacy is probably less when all data are included than when the perplexing elements are omitted. The tentative nature of inferences is then at least more obvious.

The rejection of subjective data is based upon circular reasoning which runs something like this: we must be scientific; science involves precision; precision is possible only when