SOCIOLOGICAL DETERMINATION OF OBJECTIVES IN EDUCATION

BY

DAVID SNEDDEN

Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

SOCIOLOGICAL DETERMINATION OF OBJECTIVES IN EDUCATION

SOCIOLOGICAL DETERMINATION OF OBJECTIVES IN EDUCATION

BY

DAVID SNEDDEN

Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
AT THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS
PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

PREFACE

MORE education and better education must be provided by the people and for the people if the aims of democracy are to be realized in a populous and forward striving world—this has been the verdict of all thoughtful persons trying to read the riddles of war and of peace propounded by our age.

But education is not an easily standardized commodity like wheat or coal or gold. Its varieties are numberless, and their gradations of worth as yet undetermined. More education—yes, if it is of right kinds; better education—what is it, and how shall it be known? More education, always increasing in cost—for whose advantage? Better education—better for the individual or for the "small" group to which the small-souled man wholly gives himself, or for the state and humanity to which the true citizen dedicates his best efforts?

What, in fine, should be the objectives or purposes—not of education in the abstract, which is a problem for metaphysicians—but of each of hundreds of varieties of education as practicable of attainment with scores of types of potential citizens? And how are these types of potential citizens to be distinguished by virtue of native inheritance, modifying environment and probable prospects? Here lie very many problems for future statesmen, sociologists and educators.

The actual objectives of much of our education still rest largely on faiths and beliefs—often hardened into dogmas as to educational values, and the *ex-parte* creeds of subject-matter specialists. College entrance requirements, framed with little appreciation of the needs of

democratic secondary education and with even less knowledge of the educational potentialities of adolescents, still constitute the only clearly defined objectives of our public high schools, apart from certain half-hearted commercial courses.

Two forces are, however, now compelling sweeping changes in educational faiths. The multiplication of forms of useful knowledge that manifestly can and should be taught to some if not all of the rising generation brings us constantly into situations where choices must be made. We obviously cannot have everything, and it is urgent that we devise means of determining which is the best.

Again, the underlying social spirit of our time is opposed to blind action and insists on increasing purposiveness. But purposiveness in education necessitates knowledge of practicable as well as of desirable goals—practicable for learners as they now are with all their variabilities of power, capacity and opportunity; and practicable also for given societies as they now are with their needs and resources.

John Adams, the wise and witty English educator, told Americans some years ago that until recently educators had not really learned the lesson that verbs of teaching govern two accusatives. For centuries we have been content to say, "The master teaches Latin"; but the child-study movement forced progressive educators to realize that "the master teaches John (or Mary) Latin," and that it is of no less importance that he know much about John or Mary than that he know much about Latin.

But the scientific spirit of our time is about to impose a new burden on the master. He must explain and justify his reasons for teaching Latin to John or Mary

instead of music or American literature or hygiene or carpentry. To what ends, useful to society or to the individual, should the Johns and Marys or some known varieties of them study Latin—" or anything else! " the fogies will exclaim.

It is the purpose of this book to ask a variety of questions which must be answered by sociologists and educators before we can justifiably claim to possess a science of education. The writer has undertaken in each chapter to do at least three things, no one of which can, obviously, be at all completely done in the present youthful state of the social sciences. The first is to search for certain sources in the social sciences or in experience from which to derive standards of examination for the " faith objectives " now controlling in the departments dealt with; the second is to criticize those faiths which have probably come to have the injurious characteristics of superstitions; and the third is to propose, tentatively, certain new objectives for examination. Each chapter is, therefore, in a true sense an " essay " in educational sociology, designed at least to point the way to further and more detailed inquiries in this field.

Much of the material in this volume first appeared as articles in periodicals. This fact explains a variety of minor repetitions as well as some variations in style of treatment. The author wishes to express his sense of obligation to the editors of the following publications for permission to incorporate into this book materials which first appeared as articles in these journals: *The American Journal of Sociology, Educational Review, International Journal of Ethics, School Administration, School and Society, School Review, Unpopular* (now the *Unpartizan*) *Review.*

D. S.

CONTENTS

SOCIOLOGICAL DETERMINATION OF OBJECTIVES IN EDUCATION

CHAPTER I

EDUCATIONAL SOCIOLOGY: ITS PROVINCE AND POSSIBILITIES

I. INTRODUCTORY

MEN, women, and children nearly always live and work in groups or societies—clans, families, clubs, villages, partnerships, unions, cities, nations. Any given individual usually strives to "realize himself," to amount to the most possible, to "get all that he can" (in the more or less "long run") by virtue of the advantages of living and working in various groups. Because all other individuals do the same, group membership involves endless adjustments, compromises, tensions, quiet struggles, and sometimes open and violent conflicts.

In any given group of human beings the "strong" individual usually exerts a greater influence on the "weak" individual than does the weak on the strong. (It is assumed than an individual is stronger because he is older, or of keener mind, or of stronger body, or of better training, or of greater coöperative ability than another.) Normally, also, however, if the weakness of an individual is due to youth, lack of experience, or the performance of special function, then strong individuals protect him and give him opportunity to grow to full usefulness.

In any given human group a portion of the strength of

any individual is due, as in the case of animals, to innate or (biologically) inherited powers and capacities as these develop when given time and nurture. But another portion is due to the stored knowledge, tools, and methods of living and work which the group has accumulated and passes on to new members by example and education. The " strength " of a social group, therefore, consists not only of the sum of the biological strengths of the individuals composing it at any one time, but also of the character and amount of this accumulated knowledge—the social inheritance which can in part exist outside of any individuals for the time being (such as inventions, laws, books).

The foregoing paragraphs, which could easily be indefinitely multiplied, express some of the truisms of contemporary sociological science. They suggest that the sociologist thinks constantly in terms of social groups of human beings, but also in terms of the individuals composing these groups. Numberless quotations from sociological writers could be cited which would seem to suggest, too, that the sociologist is frequently preoccupied with aspirations and plans for " improving " conditions or for discovering the means whereby more individuals may have more well-being than is now the case.

But the sociologist is clearly not the only man to have these aspirations and plans. Deep-rooted in the nature of every man, animal, and plant, too, probably, is the ambition, desire, instinct, or vital tendency (call it what we will) to " get on," to survive, to accomplish as much as possible. Very early in the lives of many species it is found that these results can best be accomplished by co-operations—and coöperative abilities become as much the ends of evolution through natural selection or through design as protecting horns, or bigger muscles, or more

active brain. Nearly all inventions, governments, religions, and social customs have been evolved to help men to "get on," to have "life more abundantly." Hence a very large portion of the effort that men have expended on inventions, governments, religions, and other social agencies has been expended to help either these persons themselves, or others in whom they were interested, to have life more abundantly, to realize more happiness and less suffering, to "multiply and replenish the earth," and to enjoy the fullness thereof. Every man who has led an army to punish an enemy or has tried to further a religion has been concerned with his own or his fellows' well-being. So has every man who has sought to discover a new, or to improve an old, tool; to add new knowledge to the social inheritance; to make two blades of grass grow where but one grew before; to heal the sick; to reform the delinquent; to promote justice; or to educate the young.

It can be said of the sociologist only that he is trying to see social conditions more comprehensively and a little more profoundly than these others. He is trying to get at the more obscure relations and processes involved and to substitute tested knowledge for the half-knowledge of inference or slowly evolved faiths. Quite probably he finds it especially desirable that some persons shall study those things affecting human well-being which are important over long periods of time and for large numbers of people. Often he becomes especially solicitous for the well-being of those weaker ones who seem to be crowded down or aside by stronger individuals or stronger groups in pursuit of their ends. Sociology is still a very young science, a very imperfectly developed field of knowledge; and conscious applications of its results have been made in only a few of the major departments of human action. The sociologist has already exerted visible influence in the

treatment of dependency and crime. Indirectly he seems to be affecting policies of control of colonial dependencies and of state oversight or direction of some phases of production. But he has had as yet little recognition in practical efforts to improve religion, war, finance, economic production in general, domestic life, or education.

Nevertheless, it is certain that sociology is now rapidly amassing knowledge and evolving methods which must soon find application in all departments of social study. It has frequently happened that a department of practical effort has advanced far as an art before science became available for application. The working of iron and steel had reached an advanced stage of development before physics and chemistry gave a basis for scientific metallurgy. Tillage of the soil and breeding of domestic animals had elaborate technics before chemistry and biology had reached a stage where help could be procured from them. Healing the sick and preventing disease had become highly developed arts long before the appearance of physiology or bacteriology as sciences. Pedagogical practice, in schools and elsewhere, had produced its arts and its discussions of teaching problems long before men thought of applying psychology to their elucidation.

There are many indications that sociology has now reached a stage of evolution where its findings and methods can in large measure be made available for the further development of government, coöperative production, religion, domestic life, and education. It is noteworthy that traditions, beliefs, faiths, and customs play a large part in any field of practice in the stages prior to the application of knowledge and methods from the sciences; in fact, they frequently constitute the bulk of the social inheritance of guiding principles of aim, procedure, and valuation. Such was the case with the

mechanical industries largely until the end of the eighteenth century; such was the case with medicine and agriculture (except as to a few factors) until well along in the nineteenth century; and such is still, in large measure, the case with education, social control, and domestic life.

But we are clearly approaching a time of transition even in the new fields. Hardly a modern problem of politics, religion, education, economics, or community coöperation but forces us back to needs of more exact knowledge that in the last resort only the sociologist can supply—or will be expected to supply—when he is ready, for no one can pretend that sociology, relatively, is to-day more advanced or more in the possession of needed keys of interpretation than was chemistry in 1720 or biology in 1820. We have seen how psychology in its speculative stages waited generations and in its more scientific stage, years, until it came partly to a fruition of its dreams of application in the recent war. Now education, industry, and government are clamoring for its contributions.

2. PURPOSES

The time is ripe to begin a careful examination of the possible contributions of sociology and social economy to education. The two sciences most fundamental to education are sociology and psychology. From sociology must come answers to the question, What shall be the aims of education? From psychology must come answers to the questions, What is the educability of the individual? and, How shall we best instruct, train, or otherwise educate toward predetermined goals?

In the empirical fashion characteristic of social action in prescientific stages educators have, of course, for thousands of years determined the purposes of conscious

education on the basis of such knowledge and belief as was available regarding the needs of the family, tribe, state, army, craft, or church. The education of princes and priests, the training of captains and soldiers, and the instruction of citizens in reading and writing have nearly always been designed partly, if not chiefly, for the good of society or some important group thereof. At times it may have appeared that the good of the individual was the chief goal—in the teaching of Latin to the sons of gentlemen, a trade to the prospective guildsman, arithmetic to the American farmer's boy, or algebra to the minister's daughter. But no serious student would at any time have defended these efforts on purely individualistic grounds. The prevailing beliefs of the time held that the public good was somehow served through the persons thus rendered more cultured, keener, or more upright than they would otherwise have been. We may flatter ourselves that we have discovered the social justifications of public or endowed education; but in reality we have only restated ancient purposes in slightly more modern terms.

Lester F. Ward, Herbert Spencer, and some other prominent sociologists have indicated some of the possibilities of educational sociology. But educators who have recently written on this subject have been unnecessarily modest in their claims. They have seemed to hold that educational sociology should concern itself only or chiefly with the newer extensions and modifications of educational theory and practice. They have seemed desirous of avoiding recognition of the undoubted fact that the proper province of this study is the entire range of educational aims, traditional and modern, social and individual. Its primary concern must be with normal groups being educated under normal conditions.

Two recent tendencies in education have probably