

NOTES AND COMMENTS

AUTHORITARIAN AND EGALITARIAN FORCES SHAPE THE SCHOOL WORK ETHIC

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This paper summarizes the development of modern education as a rational response to the demands of nationalism and industrialization in western societies. The problem of how to best encourage the "school work ethic" is reflected in conflicts between authoritarian and egalitarian ideals in the development of modern education. Tension is seen when one focuses on the use of grading scales. Early in the twentieth century, the very formal authoritarian 0-100 scale was modified to an ABCDE scale at the urging of liberal forces. That scale was modified to ABCDF as authoritarian forces emphasized the negative connotations of "failing."

Why are the letters "ABCDF" normally used to designate the quality of academic achievement? Why is it that a numeric scale is not employed? Considerable emphasis has been placed upon the systematic organization of human thought and action as highly rational modern science has gained in importance among educators. Is it not strange that persons with such biases should evaluate students with a grading scale which does not even follow the normal sequence of the traditional English alphabet? Why is the "E" left out of the scale?

This paper finds that an ongoing conflict between authoritarian and egalitarian social forces has influenced the way in which the "school work ethic" has been supported by modern educators. That influence is reflected in the fact that letters rather than numbers are used in grading scales. It has fostered the elimination of the "E" from the "ABCDE" grading scale.

INFLUENCE ON SCHOOL WORK ETHIC: AUTHORITARIAN VS. EGALITARIAN FORCES

The "school work ethic" is a primary value of modern education. This value has essentially the same characteristics as

the work ethic within the economic institution. The work ethic reveals itself in society at large as a morally grounded social force driving people to do their best to produce goods and services for themselves and others. The educational version of this value channels these efforts toward academic productivity. For the young, the school work ethic may be seen as a value which prepares members of industrial societies for lifelong obeisance to the work ethic.

The value of "working hard in school" is supported differently by authoritarian and egalitarian ideals. Weber (1946) noted that polar forces of centralization and decentralization operate in bureaucratic organizations. Conflict between these forces generates subordinate types of this conflict. Conflict between forces of authoritarianism and egalitarianism cross-cut institutional sectors of society at various levels. For example, within the political institution dictatorial and democratic forces vie for power.

One can focus upon subordinate types of these two basic forces acting within modern education at the classroom level. At that level, authoritarian forces favor placing power in the hands of the instructor. That is exemplified through the use of symbols of power and authority. Regimentation of classroom settings and utilization of evaluatory devices which enhance the appearance of precision and objectivity support their power. Historically this approach has promoted the "school work ethic" through the dunce cap, strict ranking procedures, detention, and other forms of educational stigmatization. Egalitarian forces promote less precise measures of the creative self-expression which teachers, moved by these forces, encourage students to display in their work. This ideal supports grading systems which disperse power through the use of non-stigmatizing standards and imprecise scales.

This report will first summarize the interaction of forces promoting the unification of dispersement of power within modern education. It will then focus on grading scales used within American educational organizations. The ongoing interaction will be shown to have a practical effect in conflicts over

appropriate grading scales. The ABCDF scale is a current compromise between authoritarian and egalitarian social forces.

CENTRALIZATION OF CONTROL WITHIN MODERN EDUCATIONAL BUREAUCRACIES

Modern educational organizations seek to produce and distribute knowledge. During recent centuries in western societies there has been a strong trend toward efficiency in the pursuit of these goals. Research has become highly scientific. Teaching at all levels has become very specialized and the evaluation of students has become quite systematic.

Aries (1962:173-254) informs us that during the Middle Ages European schools were not stratified according to type, such as elementary, secondary, college, and university. Academic subjects were not hierarchically ranked according to difficulty. There was no first, second and third grade grammar or arithmetic. Rather, students of various ages gathered to listen to a teacher they held in high esteem to learn assorted academic matters. Students possessed the greater power. By their mere presence at lectures, students evaluated their teachers. Instructors evaluated students subjectively through oral interaction and generally unstructured written work.

During modern times relationships between students and teachers, and their social organization, have become much more complicated. The modern period has promoted the stratification of educational structures. Power and prestige have become focused at the peak of these emerging structures. Today there is a clear ranking of types of educational organizations—elementary, secondary and college. Subject matter is now arranged according to degree of difficulty and students are grouped according to age. Also, the power to evaluate has shifted from students to teachers. Ebel (1972:300-315) noted that among teachers today objective evaluations are perceived as an ideal tool for ranking students.

TENSIONS BETWEEN AUTHORITARIAN AND
EGALITARIAN FORCES WITHIN MODERN EDUCATION

Conflicting forces of centralization and decentralization generate inescapable contradictions within bureaucratic entities.

Spring (1972) noted that the expansion of educational opportunities was strongly fostered by the demand for public education. All citizens were to have an equal chance to get a basic education. That demand arose on the democratic side of the tide of industrialism and nationalism. Lauter and Alexander (1969) have shown the ties between political and educational sectors through activities of the American Council of Education. They show that this agency sought to "mobilize the resources of higher education for nationalistic purposes." Modern education reflects a social reaction to the need for the systematic production and distribution of knowledge—often in support of nationalistic and industrial movements. Education's existence is often justified through its support of humanitarian values and promotion of equal opportunity.

Parents constitute a faction opposing the centralization of opportunities to gain access to the scarce resources of society. They favored bureaucratization of education and the centralization of control which accompanied it only when it was perceived as a route to social mobility for their children. Only then were they willing to accept the additional tax burden necessary to support public education.

Herman (1976:287-289), in citing an 1884 Board of Education Report, shows the authoritarian side of the emergence of modern education. During that time the factory served as a model of organizational creativity. Regimentation and precision were powerful values. Bowles (1972) has shown that the stratification of educational institutions tends to retard social mobility. Essentially he argues that students of wealthy parents are more likely to be able to attend prestigious academic institutions than students of poor parents. And, graduates of prestigious schools tend to achieve positions of greater wealth, power, and esteem in their postgraduate life. Thus, while education may serve as a means to generate social mobility, there is little change

in the generation to generation stratification of families in society (cf. Karier, 1973).

Modern education follows the enlargement of bureaucratic systems developed to foster national and industrial movements. The authoritarian impact of bureaucratic influences may be seen in the similarity between the factory system—a process designed to mass produce America into economic prosperity, and the school system—a process designed to mass produce the American society out of illiteracy. Spring (1972) and Callahan (1962) both point out that the rise of the factory system as a sensible solution to economic problems is similar to the establishment of age-graded elementary schools as a rational solution to the problem of public education (cf. Curti, 1959:48-49; Lazerson, 1971).

Throughout the nineteenth century there was a continually increasing demand for a system of public education which promoted national ideals, provided basic training in the "three R's," and advocated "moral education." In America, the "Dame school"—one woman teaching and controlling children of assorted ages between six and sixteen in one large classroom—was common throughout this period. That was the era of the "School Mom." During this time, the dunce cap was used by teachers as a symbol of their power to stigmatize children who did not support the school work ethic. Students were given a simple "P" or "F" to indicate whether or not they had passed on to the next grade. Such a simple system could not support the rapid growth and changes taking place in America's social movements (Otto, 1973).

At mid-century, Horace Mann successfully sponsored a system for America which had become popular in Germany. It featured the age-graded stratification of students for formal instruction (Katz, 1968). Students of the same age were grouped in a single classroom. Each classroom had one teacher—a specialist trained to teach that age group. Brown (1968) notes that this solution to the problem of public education resulted in the first graded school in America at Quincy, Massachusetts in 1848. It was divided into eight grades. This form of elementary school became popular throughout the country.

Goodlad (1959) indicates that the McGuffey Reader was intended for six grades and provided an alternative period of time for defining the elementary level of education. The reader promoted systematic teaching of the "Three R's" and had a strong nationalistic orientation grounded in moral claims. The Reader fostered evolution to the three tier system of elementary, junior high, and senior high school; whereas the structure sponsored by Horace Mann resulted in a two level system of elementary and high school.

The American population expanded rapidly during the nineteenth century. Children of illiterate immigrants had to be educated. The industrial and nationalistic movements required literate populations. Consequently the demand for quality teachers and elementary schools increased rapidly. These factors gave impetus to the creation of higher types of educational organization—secondary schools, colleges, and universities. The number of high schools in the United States increased 2000 percent between 1870 and 1910—from 500 to 10,000 (Chauncey and Doblin, 1963:27-45; Johanningsmeier, 1978). That was a considerable financial expenditure for an American public which generally did not see high school as being valuable in itself.

Parents saw the high school primarily as a vehicle of social mobility for their children. Many of them questioned whether or not their children should attend high school—where they did not immediately contribute either to their own economic support or to that of their family. Parents wanted to know if their children were succeeding in school. They wanted easy to understand reports on the academic progress of their children. With these reports they could decide if a child should be in the fields or a factory where their work would be immediately profitable. They viewed the high school essentially as a testing ground to determine how far their children might progress in society.

Public education has also been used to promote egalitarian ideals: From its founding concept of education for the "public," to the current use of elementary and secondary schools as the major mechanisms used to foster racial integration. But, at the classroom level centralizing tendencies created the need to rank

students. Such ranking has been done through the use of academic evaluatory tools—marking scales.

Marking Scales

Three factors strongly encouraged the creation of grading scales: parental concerns about the academic standing of their children; college entrance requirements demanding that qualitative and quantitative academic distinctions be drawn between high school graduates; and the need for motivational devices to foster compliance with the school work ethic.

Prior to the twentieth century, irregular notes on a child's academic progress, but more generally notes concerning behavior, were the basic form of communication between teachers and parents. Even within universities, behavior was an aspect of evaluations. Rudolf (1962:348) indicated that in 1869 student evaluations at Harvard University were tied to student conduct. Students at all levels feared the "note from the teacher." Fear of a bad report from teachers remains as a typical individual emotional reaction to this traditional form of parent-teacher communication. However, now it is a reaction to the more rational system of communication—the report card (Karmel, 1970:417-420).

At the turn of the century, the growth of colleges lagged far behind the very rapid growth of high schools. There were far more high school graduates with parents who could afford higher education for them than colleges and universities could accept (Rudolf, 1962:289). Colleges demanded proof of academic quality from applicants. That forced the creation of a program for the systematic recording of grades based on a rational system of evaluation. High schools needed measuring instruments to facilitate the ranking of students in an unbiased manner. They required scales which would enable them to compare students from one part of the country to another.

Grading scales not only improved the channeling of students from high schools to college, but they also served as tools to support the school work ethic. Davis (1964:289) notes that grading was used as a motivating device for students during the last part of the nineteenth century. Discussing colleges of this period,

Rudolf (1962) points out that "everywhere more attention was being paid to various sectioning, grading, and marking schemes as instruments of scholarly stimulation." Ranking clarified for students the modern emphasis upon hard work and success earned through competition (Karmel, 1970:417-420). That orientation in school work prepared them for their economic and political life (cf. Jencks and Riesman, 1968:61-62). Individual classroom competition and the academic stratification of students became vanguards in the movement of modern education.

Various techniques for measuring intellectual distinctions were developed in Europe and America. Schudson (1972:36) notes that the College Board "was founded to bring order to the chaos of college entrance requirements in the eastern states." By 1900 the 0-100 scale was popular throughout all levels of the American school system.

MODIFICATION OF THE 0-100 SCALE—A REDUCTION OF CLASSROOM AUTHORITARIANISM

As a major part of the contemporary aspect of the bureaucratization of modern education, grading scales have been used as tools to identify high energy calculating individuals supporting the school work ethic. All institutional sectors backed the authority of teachers to determine which students had skill and which did not. The time when students had power to evaluate their professors had passed. Compulsory education laws required attendance. Teachers were in full control.

A 0-100 scale provided "objective" proof to substantiate evaluations. The "intelligent" were easily distinguished from the "stupid" in the context of this highly rational grading scale. Students supporting the school work ethic were easily distinguished from those who did not. Stigmas were attached on the basis of a few points distinction in ranking. Low percentile scores were a sophisticated version of the dunce cap—a symbol stigmatizing those who did not adequately support the movement of modern education.

However, use of the 0-100 scale was fairly short-lived. It was perhaps never as universally employed as the ABCDF scale is

today. Use of the 0-100 scale fell into disfavor because of several studies conducted between 1910 and 1915. These studies point out inequities in the use of the 0-100 scale. The work of Daniel Starch (1912, 1913) is most significant. Working with E.C. Elliott he acquired two English papers which had received an 80 at a midwestern high school. Seventy-five was generally accepted as a passing grade. They sent copies of those papers to 200 high schools throughout the nation for evaluation by other English teachers. The scores given one paper ranged rather evenly between 64 and 98. Fifty to 97 was the range on the other. Proponents of the 0-100 scale complained that grading in English was less absolute than in the sciences and math. Starch and Elliott repeated the study in 1913 with a paper in geometry which had received an 80. Evaluations of that paper ranged from 28 to 97. As it became clear that grading was often more subjective than objective, controversy raged over fairness in marking and comparing the numerical ranking of students. As a result, the 0-100 scale fell into disrepute (Karmel, 1970:417; Hedly, 1978).

Robert Ebel, professor of education at Michigan State University, noted that from this period there was a shift from the use of absolutist objective systems of evaluation toward more relative and subjective procedures (1972:320-322). Several alternatives were developed during the second and third decades. During the 1930s the five point ABCDE scale gained popularity. By 1940, 80 percent of all high schools, colleges, and universities were using it (Davis, 1964:287-315). But in practically every instance it was quickly and informally converted to an ABCDF scale which became formally recognized. Becker, Geer and Hughes (1968) note that this is the system which provides the foundation to what, in *Making the Grade*, they call the "GPA perspective" of students at the University of Kansas in the 1960s. Why was the use of the "E" dropped?

AUTHORITARIAN REACTION AT THE SIMPLIFICATION
OF THE 0-100 SCALE TO THE ABCDE SCALE

Authoritarian forces expressed opposition to the highly simplified ABCDE scale. Use of the "F" does not reflect a rational calculation of an academic level below "D." The abyss below "D" is amorphous at best. Location of the "F" is mixed as much with emotion as with academic considerations. It is a rejection: the student is unworthy of the academic institution.

Rather than simply an objective indication of the quality of student work, which use of the "E" could indicate, regimentarians were mollified through use of the "F" as a symbolic expression identifying students who did not serve the school work ethic. The "F" points a stronger finger than the "E" at students who do not adequately support the school work ethic. It gives instructors greater power to stigmatize opponents of this ethic. In using it, the behavior of the instructor often parallels that of a frustrated middle-class parent who, disobeyed by a child after the fourth verbal warning, gives up reason and resorts to a traditional spanking.

Brown (1965:175-185) indicates that in the 1930s, when the ABCDE scale was gaining prominence, many teachers left off the bottom line on the "E" to "more emphatically express how they felt about students who received the lowest grade." He implies that teachers associated their own lack of effort in completing the letter "E" with a judgment that a student had not taken the effort to meet even the minimum academic standards.

Recognizing the subjective judgmental quality of "F's" during the academically egalitarian 1960s, numerous professors advocated the eradication of the "F" and even more simplified grading scales (cf. Hutton, 1974). Ebel (1972:320-322) expresses some regret at the simplicity of grading scales which only have two or three points. He warns, "to trade more precisely meaningful marks for marks easy to assign may be a bad bargain for education." Simple scales do not permit a clear ranking of students. These scales may not reinforce the school work ethic.

In this same work, Ebel discusses an attempted reintroduction of the ABCDE system in northern California during the 1960s. The attempt was only moderately successful. One teacher indicated that she didn't give many F's but felt that it was the proper grade rather than an "E" for students who did not "work hard."

Riesman, Gusfield, and Gamson, in a study of *Academic Values and Mass Education*, report that during the first year of classes at a new college the faculty desired to draw students with high academic abilities (1970:147). A chemist reported: "We flunked 38 percent during the first term. They deserved it. We will damn well do it again. That's how we will get better students." Better students? One might question the wisdom, or even the mental stability of a student who would chance his career in such an environment. If he were brilliant, and therefore able to recognize the importance of a GPA to his academic and occupational career, he would probably choose an "easy" school like MIT or Cal Tech. The chemist seems to be saying: "F is for flunk." The grade again reflects a bias in favor of the high energy calculating student. It is not an objective rational calculation of student's ability which could be useful for comparison with students at other schools. It reflects a demand for centralizing evaluatory power with the instructor.

There were gross inequities in grading from one department to another during the first year at the above noted college. The departments which graded most strictly were almost "religious" in their advocacy of high academic standards. When one instructor heard how severely some of his colleagues had graded, he replied: "damn it, I could have given more D's" (Riesman, Gusfield, Gamson, 1970:149).

In its drive to support the advancement of high energy calculating students, the movement of modern education uses the "F" as punishment for students who do not measure up to the instructor's interpretation of the most fundamental demands of modern education. The ABCDF scale enables an instructor to be more emphatic than is possible with the ABCDE scale successfully sponsored by opponents of the 0-100 scale. Use of the

"F" reinforces the fact that the classroom instructor is the final authority.

There is evidence to support two alternative explanations for the absence of the "E" from the ABCDF scale. It may be claimed that the "E" is not used because it could be confused with the "E" in scales which use "Excellent" as the highest grade ranking. But, such scales have not been widely used. And if one takes this stand, he implicitly claims that teachers fear that the most inadequate and incompetent quality of work could easily be confused with work of the highest and most superb quality. This claim would make a mockery of the grading system by implying that grades were totally ambiguous. One could also claim that use of the "F" is a continuation of the traditional marking system of "P" and "F" for Pass and Fail which had been common prior to the introduction of more sophisticated grading scales. I have found no empirical evidence of this as a motivational factor in teachers. But, if one assumes that this tradition remains a force in society, it merely enhances that part of the argument which says that use of the "F" supports traditional values rather than a rational evaluation of academic ability.

SUMMARY

The movement toward optimum systemization of evaluation procedures within classroom situations reflects a history of a tension between conflicting philosophies regarding the most effective way to support the school work ethic. Authoritarian oriented forces have fostered highly precise measuring instruments—such as the 0-100 scale. Egalitarian forces have supported less rigid marking devices—such as the ABCDE scale. Use of the ABCDF scale represents a compromise between these forces.

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CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY:
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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The notion that sociology and sociologists can be "clinical" is beginning to take roots, even though the roots are not well established in the field of "mental health" and other fields having to do with therapy and change. Other clinical professionals do not question the argument that sociology has knowledge and information that can be applied to problems affecting the individual, group, organization, industry and the community. Neither is there any question regarding sociological methods and techniques for producing information and creating knowledge about group life. However, there are various questions being raised by established clinical professionals regarding the "clinical" and "therapeutic" potential and skills of sociologists and sociology. An examination of the clinical nature of psychiatry, clinical psychology, and psychiatric or clinical social work is presented in this paper, and four brief examples are used to demonstrate the clinical nature of sociology.

PROBLEMS

Sociology is the study of group life, and clinical sociology focuses its attention on groups, although the clinical sociologist may work with individual members of the group as well. Therefore, within the sociocultural context of the group experience, both the micro and macro levels of clinical sociology application can be established.

The social world created by human beings in various social groups and different organizations and social systems suggest that all human problems result from the participation of individuals in group life, and are to a large extent social in nature. Consequently, "problems which appear to be psychological are often the result of difficulties a person has within groups. . ." (Glassner and Freedman, 1979:287-288). It is because of this understanding that the clinical nature of sociology must be classified and established, and the therapeutic content and techniques of sociologists must be documented and verified.