

STATUS OF SOCIOLOGY IN OKLAHOMA SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Rodney Albert and Caroline Young, Southwestern State College, Oklahoma

INTRODUCTION

This study is limited to accredited high schools in Oklahoma. We sought to determine the percentage of high schools that offer sociology, the student enrolment in such courses, the qualifications of sociology teachers, the courses other than sociology which they teach, and the content of the sociology course. A secondary concern was the high school student's interest in sociology.

In an era when there is abundant evidence that man understands the technological world far better than the world of social interaction, it would seem that sociology should be a necessary part of the high school curriculum. Only a quarter of the nation's high schools make such an offering, but educators are becoming more aware of the need for sociology at the secondary level, and they have exhibited increasing interest in the field, as is evident from the revitalization of the entire social studies program (Allen, Gross 1963). Critics point to the stagnation of the social science program, and its domination by the "sacred cow" of history (Patterson 1962). History as a safe, noncontroversial subject, avoids troubling the waters of current controversies, but it is being gradually expanded by greater use of concepts from the behavioral social sciences of cultural anthropology, sociology, and social psychology (Snyder 1965).

Recognizing the general trend of incorporating the behavioral social sciences into the high school social studies curriculum, the American Sociological Association appointed a committee on the Social Studies Curriculum of American Secondary Schools in 1961. The work of this committee led to the organization of the Sociological Resources for the Social Studies (SRSS) funded by a National Science Foundation grant. The main concerns of the SRSS were: 1) to design teaching materials that can be used in many social studies courses, including sociology; 2) to design a high school sociology course. The SRSS course emphasized the scientific method of inquiry, and employs inductive teaching procedures (Phillips 1969). The SRSS course differs strikingly in content and method from that

currently found in most high schools offering sociology. Much of the content taught in high school sociology has concentrated on personal problems of students, social problems, and problems related to marriage and the family (Switzer, Wilson 1969; Corcoran et al 1950).

METHOD

We collected data from the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and from a mailed questionnaire sent to Oklahoma high school sociology teachers. Of the 220 high schools offering sociology, 100 were selected by a stratified random sampling technique. We attempted to select a representative sample including both large and small high schools. The larger high schools were those with more than 50 students enrolled in sociology classes, and the smaller schools were those with less than 50 sociology enrollees. The return rate was .67. An informal cover letter explaining the objectives of the study contributed to the high rate of return.

FINDINGS

Of the 476 high schools in Oklahoma, 46 percent have offered a sociology course in the last two years, compared to 25 percent for all secondary schools in the United States. Accurate enrolment figures for sociology classes in Oklahoma were difficult to obtain because the accredited schools submit on a semester basis the number of enrollees by class. In the Fall of 1968, 7,901 were enrolled in sociology classes; in the fall of 1969, 7,256 were enrolled. Figures for spring semester enrolments were not available. Teachers were asked to rank the disciplines in social studies in order of importance. Mean rank assignments were grouped by: 1) teachers with more than 15 hours' college training in sociology, and 2) teachers with less than 15 hours' training (Table 1). The Spearman *rho* correlation is .83, showing a high level of agreement between teachers with the higher and lower levels of training.

High school teachers of sociology reported a mean of 14.8 hours of sociology coursework, with a range from 3 hours to 45 hours.

TABLE 1: TEACHERS' RANKING OF SOCIAL SCIENCE SUBJECTS BY AMOUNT OF SOCIOLOGY TRAINING

Course	Hours of Training			
	15 +		Under 15	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
Sociology	1	1.8	2	2.8
History	2	2.9	1	2.7
Psychology	3	3.0	4	3.2
Government	4	3.2	3	3.0
Geography	5	4.1	6	4.3
Economics	6	4.2	5	4.1

TABLE 2: OTHER COURSES TAUGHT BY TEACHERS OF SOCIOLOGY

Course:	Number of teachers
Psychology	30
History	29
Democracy problems	19
Economics	15
English	15
Government	9
Civics	9
Geography	4
Business subjects	3
Speech	3
Spanish	2
Mathematics	2

TABLE 3: COURSE OFFERED BEFORE OR AFTER SOCIOLOGY COURSE

Course	Number of schools
Psychology	127
Economics	20
Democracy problems	14
Geography	7
Government	3
Health	2
Democracy	2
Social problems	1
International problems	1
Human relations	1
Indian psychology	1
Driver education	1
Vocations	1
Information unavailable	40

TABLE 4: TEACHER SATISFACTION WITH HIGH SCHOOL SOCIOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

Text Author	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
Landis	22	13
Cole et al.	6	2
Quin	4	5
Gavian et al.	2	2

TABLE 5: SOCIOLOGY EMPHASIS AREAS REPORTED BY OKLAHOMA TEACHERS (N = 67)

Emphasis Area	Percent
Social problems	87
Marriage, family, dating	67
Social living	64
Culture	64
Socialization	49
Institutions	49
Concepts	48
Social welfare	39
Theory	31
Other	13

TABLE 6: SOCIOLOGY INTEREST AREA AS REPORTED BY STUDENTS

Interest area	Percent
Social problems	57
Marriage and dating	33
Concepts, theory	3
Other	7

Of these, 9 percent had 30 or more hours of college training in sociology; 40 percent had 15+ hours, and 21 percent had 6 hours or less. And 66 percent indicated that sociology was a minor area of teaching. These data support the assumption that the high school teacher of sociology is rather poorly prepared. In a study of high school teachers of sociology in Illinois, 82 percent had fewer than 13 hours of college training in sociology (Grupp 1961), and the literature reflects a similar situation elsewhere. The high school teachers of sociology reported teaching 14 other courses as shown in Table 2. Table 3 indicates

courses offered in high schools either immediately preceding or following the sociology course. Psychology and sociology are offered as accompanying courses in a majority of the schools. Most courses offered in conjunction with sociology seem well related.

The textbook choice for high school sociology courses has generally been perceived as inadequate. Before the advent of the SRSS, the use of college sociology texts was advocated, and was considered justifiable since sociology is predominantly a senior year course in high schools generally, and in Oklahoma. Table 4 shows the textbooks most generally used by our respondents, and their level of satisfaction with the sociology text.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the SRSS proposed courses of study for high school sociology students reveals the use of the inductive method of teaching. Oklahoma sociology courses apparently differ in content from the SRSS proposal. Table 5 indicates the areas of intended emphasis by the sociology teachers in Oklahoma high schools. Table 6 shows the rather different orientation of student interest, as reported by the teachers.

Social problems, dating, marriage and family are apparently the areas of emphasis reported by teachers, with a lack of emphasis on concepts and theory. Assuming that any basic course should teach the primary fundamentals of the subject, students should be given a foundation in the vocabulary of sociological terms and an overview of theory at the high

school level. There is the possibility, however, that concepts, terms, and theory are integrated into the popular areas of marriage and social problems.

We summarize with four major findings from this study: 1) Sociology teachers in Oklahoma at the high school level are apparently poorly prepared. 2) Oklahoma high school teachers of sociology show a strong interest in the field. 3) Course content in the high schools is centered primarily around areas of social problems, marriage, and dating. 4) A larger percentage of Oklahoma high schools are offering sociology than is shown in surveys on a national level.

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