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Socio-Economic Status of a Sample of Rural Future Teachers Compared with Status of Rural Pupils in School

By WILLIAM H. DREIER

Within the past ten years psychologists have seen more and more evidence from their research that the influence of social class of the school pupil may be as important in determining the success of the individual child as is his mental age, his chronological age, his physical development and his emotional stability. Eells, Davis, Havighurst, Herrick and Tyler (1) have presented this kind of information.

Of special importance to the teacher as she considers the problem of classroom motivation is the wide differences which have been found between the social class of the teacher and the majority of her pupils. Davis (2) has said, "More than 70 out of every 100 of our elementary school children come from . . . lower socio-economic groups . . . (but) more than 95 out of every 100 teachers are from the middle socio-economic groups."

The effect of this and other like reports may be summarized by the statement Lenn (3) made in a recent issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology*:

"It appears from the Davis statistics that the average American school teacher, representing a cultural way of life very much different from that of most of her pupils, cannot but fail to understand the very large majority of her pupils unless she first understands the social structure within which she operates."

It is the purpose of this paper to look at some farm pupils and their teachers to see if this part of the rural population has the wide variation in social class or socio-economic status reported by Davis and others. A measure of socio-economic status of farm people was first selected. This scale was then used to indicate the socio-economic status of farm youth attending public schools in the open country and in rural non-farm places (towns of less than 2,500 population). Finally the same scale was administered to a group of rural youth preparing to be elementary teachers.

Farm people are generally recognized as a segment of or largely belonging to the middle class. Warner and Loeb (4) state, "There is not much scientific basis for locating farmers in the social class structure, but the ordinary small farmer in the Middle West would participate with upper-middle or lower-middle class people in the neighboring small cities." This middle class position is

recognized by the Minnesota Scale for Paternal Occupations (5) which lists seven classes of occupations ranging from Class I—professional, to Class VII—day laborers of all classes. According to this classification, Class IV—farmers would include 15 out of a sample of 100 employed white males. It is common knowledge, however, that within the farm group there is a wide range of status based on such factors as ownership, family prestige, income and participation in organizations.

A scale devised by Sewell (6) has been found to discriminate between the various levels of socio-economic status of farm people. The short form of this scale was used by the author on a sample of 6th, 9th, and 12th grade rural youth attending graded and ungraded elementary schools and high schools in rural areas in Minnesota (7).

Another paper has described how the groups within this sample of 1,498 youth did not differ significantly in their socio-economic scores and listed percentile norms based on the total sample (8).

Although Iowa has some 35 teacher training institutions which prepare elementary teachers, the largest single source of elementary teachers is the Iowa State Teachers College located at Cedar Falls. During a four year period, from 1949 to 1953, a total of 1,590, elementary teachers were graduated. Eighty percent of these received the two-year diploma and the other 20 percent the B. A. degree. Few of the B. A. graduates start teaching in towns with less than 2,500 population. The two-year graduates begin their teaching in independent and consolidated districts located in the very smallest villages as well as the towns and some start their work in cities. The future teachers who are most likely to be teaching farm and non-farm children attending schools in places of less than 2,500 population, are the college students enrolled in the two-year curriculum.

During these four years the author regularly taught one of the courses, School and Community, in the two-year curriculum. Each quarter he had from one to four sections of this course. During one quarter of 1949, 1950 and again in 1953 all of the students in the various sections of this course were asked to fill out the Sewell Socio-economic Scale (short form). Information obtained from these students about the place of their home environment indicates that usually one-half have a farm background, about one-fourth came from non-farm areas and the remaining one-fourth from towns over 5,000.

Table 1 lists the number of students each quarter in the three-way classification of their background; farm, non-farm, and urban. The mean socio-economic score for each group is given with its standard deviation. The Sewell Socio-economic Scale (short form) was devised for use in rural areas. Since scores were available for

Table 1.

Mean Socio-economic Status Scores of Future Elementary Teachers in One Class of the Two Year Curriculum at Iowa State Teachers College.

Background	Quarter-Year	N	Mean	S.D.
Farm	Fall, 1949	50	79.80	7.61
	Winter, 1950	51	79.73	7.51
	Spring, 1950	93	81.16	8.86
	Winter, 1953	50	82.16	6.85
	Total	244	80.79	7.99
Non-farm including towns to 5,000	Fall, 1949	30	81.33	7.19
	Winter, 1950	25	81.56	7.57
	Spring, 1950	60	81.28	5.63
	Winter, 1953	22	78.00	5.81
	Total	137	80.82	6.50
Urban or cities over 5,000	Winter, 1950	26	81.35	8.04
	Spring, 1950	35	83.00	6.82
	Winter, 1953	20	81.79	6.08
	Total	90	82.13	7.02

the urban group for three of the four quarters, however, the mean scores are included in the table in order to give a complete picture of these classes of future elementary teachers.

The mean score of the 244 future elementary teachers with a farm background was 80.79 with a standard deviation of 6.50.

Table 2 compares the mean scores of these future elementary teachers with the percentile norms established on 1,498 sixth, ninth and twelfth grade rural youth attending ungraded schools in the open country and graded schools in places of less than 2,500 persons.

Table 2.

Socio-economic Scores of Future Elementary Teachers Compared with Percentile Norms of Rural Public School Students.

	Place of Residence			
	Farm		Non-farm	
	Future Teachers Raw Score	School Students Percentile	Future Teachers Raw Score	School Students Percentile
Plus 1.5 S.D.	91.0*	100	90.6	98
Plus 1.0 S.D.	88.8	96	87.3	95
Mean score	80.8	87	80.8	87
Minus 1.0 S.D.	72.8	69	74.3	73
Minus 1.5 S.D.	68.8	58	71.1	64

*The maximum score on the Sewell Socio-economic Scale (short form) is 91.

The mean score or mid point of both groups of future teachers was equal to a public school percentile of 87. Half of the farm groups of future teachers come from families with socio-economic scores equal to the upper one-eighth of the rural pupils.

A spread of 1.5 standard deviations on either side of the mean normally includes 87 percent of the group. The raw score of future teachers 1.5 standard deviations below the mean was equal to a score made by 58 percent of the farm school students and 64 percent of the non-farm students.

The data indicates that 50 percent of the teachers in both groups have a socio-economic background enjoyed by only the upper 13 percent of the pupils. Seven out of eight, or 87 percent, of the farm group of future teachers come from families with socio-economic scores equal to the upper one-half of the farm pupils and the upper one-third of the non-farm pupils. It seems logical to conclude from this study that in the rural sections of the Middle West the teacher is likely to come from a home on a farm or village with a higher socio-economic status than the social class represented by the majority of her pupils.

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