

## The “Collective Mind” at Work: A Decade in the Life of U.S. *Sociology of Education*<sup>1</sup>

By Steven Brint

You have asked me to speak about the current state of the sociology of education in the United States. The temptation is great in such an assignment to applaud the sub-discipline for following one’s own cherished positions or to lament its failure to do so. I will (for the most part) resist these temptations and talk instead about what a study of the “collective mind” of the field tells us about the current interests (and blind spots) of the field, the controversies that animate it, and the extent to which other possible discourses on education in society would be as scientifically productive.

By using the term “collective mind” I do not have in mind a Hegelian notion of the Spirit realizing itself in history, or indeed any integrated image of the collective mind. Instead, I have a pluralistic and fragmented image, based on counting each specific piece of work in the field. One can count the pieces of work to form an image of the whole. As this reference to counting suggests, my approach will be quantitative. I have read and coded the last ten years of work in *The Sociology of Education*, the leading U.S. journal in the sub-discipline and will present a portrait of the collective mind of the field based on a content analysis of that body of work.

Although I anticipate that you will find the results of this exercise illuminating, it is important to emphasize that my methodology has clear limitations. Many other journals publish work by U.S. sociologists of education, including the *American*

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*Educational Research Journal* and the *American Journal of Education*, to mention just two of the more prominent. Leading journals in sociology, such as the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*, also occasionally publish work by sociologists of education. And, of course, my methodology leaves out book publication altogether.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the collective mind of the U.S. sociology of education is only one part of a much larger collective mind defined by the intellectual field of education studies. This larger collective mind can be conceived as the aggregate of all journals and book publication related to education and educational systems from all countries in the world and on all topics – from cognition to pedagogy to classroom and school organization. Separate publications explore comparative education systems, policy issues in education both internationally and in national contexts, the psychology of learning, pedagogical materials, higher education studies, science studies, and many other topics.

From this overview, it is clear that the U.S. *Sociology of Education* is a small part of the intellectual division of labor in the field of education studies. Many the silences in the collective mind of U.S. sociology of education can be understood as efforts to claim niche space within the complex ecology of the broader intellectual field. As I will show, the niche space claimed by the U.S. sociology of education focuses on studies of educational achievement and educational attainment as conditioned by social inequality, family and student behaviors, and school organization. Although it is indirectly influenced by contemporary policy issues, *Sociology of Education* typically does not engage policy directly, because other journals and books examine policy. It is relatively

silent on comparison of educational systems, because other journals and books examine educational systems from a comparative perspective. Given this intellectual division of labor, we can perhaps feel comforted that important issues neglected by the sociology of education are not entirely neglected by the larger collective mind, which includes all of the pedagogical and social science disciplines and the journals attached to these disciplines.

Accordingly, the most that I will claim for my approach is that it is a partial picture of the collective mind in the U.S. sociology of education, albeit a partial picture that is closely connected to the core of the sub-discipline. The journal *Sociology of Education* is the one of the highest ranked education journals in the U.S. and the only highly ranked journal that publishes the work of sociologists of education more or less exclusively. Its acceptance rate ranges between 10 and 15 percent and thus one can make a persuasive case that the journal represents work that is at the forefront of current sociological thinking about education in the U.S. During the period I examined, the years 1999-2008, the journal published work by many of the leading senior sociologists of education in the United States, including Karl Alexander of Johns Hopkins University; Adam Gamoran of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Maureen Hallinan of Notre Dame University; Larry W. Hedges of the University of Chicago; John W. Meyer of Stanford University; and James E. Rosenbaum of Northwestern University. I also published two articles in the journal during the period.

As the core journal in the field, the collective mind represented in the journal defines the center of gravity in the sub-discipline. A survey of active sociologists of education in the United States, particularly those located at research-intensive

universities, would almost certainly replicate the contours of the collective mind as defined by my analysis of the last decade of articles in the sub-discipline's leading journal.

### *Method*

Between 1999 and 2008, 168 articles appeared in *Sociology of Education*, between three and five articles in each of four issues during the year. (In 2000, the journal published a special extra issue, which included essays about current thinking about key issues in the sub-discipline). I did not code editorials, editor's introductions to special issues, or the short-lived "critical perspectives" section, which consisted of brief essays on topical issues.

I coded each of the articles that met my criteria for inclusion in four ways. First, I classified the article by methodology: either quantitative or qualitative. In a few cases, both types of methodology were equally prominent. I noted these articles separately. Second, I classified the level of education addressed in the article: primary/secondary or tertiary. In some cases, articles concerned both primary/secondary and tertiary education. In these cases, I did not classify the article. Third, I classified the article into one eight major topical categories. These major topical categories included: (1) inequality, (2) "non-structural" sources of achievement, (3) culture/ideology, (4) school organization/school effects, (5) state/politics, (6) labor market/labor market transitions, (7) comparative/historical analysis, and (8) methods. Finally, I classified articles into a more fine-grained topical scheme of 22 categories in all. I will not provide detail on these categories, but I will reference some of them in the course of my discussion of the

collective mind of U.S. sociology of education, as represented by its leading journal, over the last decade.

I will concentrate my discussion of content on the distribution of articles into the eight major topical categories listed above. Therefore, let me elaborate the conventions that I used in coding articles into these categories.

I classified the articles based on the primary emphasis in the article. Where possible, I tried to classify under one category only. I classified only a handful of articles under more than one category, because I could not determine its primary emphasis. Many articles encompass more than one of the eight categories that I used for initial classificatory purposes. As noted, I coded all articles I could into one category only. However, I could not categorize a very few articles into only one category. Such an article might, for example, discuss the effects of tracking on student achievement, with particular attention to racial/ethnic disparities. I coded such an article as concerning both inequality (specifically, race) and school effects (specifically, tracking).

I made a distinction in coding between the major structural bases of inequality in American society (i.e. social class, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and gender) and social structures and behaviors that vary within these broad strata (such as family structure or student work effort). I reserved the category “non-structural sources of achievement” for articles that took up these latter sources of variation in educational outcomes. Thus, articles about the effects of work effort, drinking behavior, or obesity on student achievement were coded into this category, but articles about the effects of wealth or immigration status on educational attainment were coded into the “inequality and schools” category.

In this coding scheme, “culture/ideology” includes articles both on cultural influences on the organization of schooling and the influences of the organization of schooling on culture. An example of the former would be an article on the interpersonal strategies used by high-achieving students to mask their school achievements in settings that belittle intellectuality. An example of the latter would be an article on the effects of educational attainment on attitudes about public affairs.

I will not make strong claims for the accuracy of my coding. In some cases, other equally expert coders would likely have made different coding choices. However, many of the articles were not difficult to code, and I believe the measurement error due to coding mistakes is relatively minor.

### *The Contours of the “Collective Mind”*

I can now discuss the contours of the collective mind of the *Sociology of Education* over the last decade of its life.

One inescapable conclusion is that the collective mind of U.S. sociology of education, as represented in its leading journal, is highly quantitative. Of those articles classifiable into one of two methodologies, 131 articles relied on quantitative methodologies, and only 27 articles relied on qualitative methodologies. The ratio is almost 6:1 in favor of quantitative methods. Given the number of high-quality data sets currently available to educational researchers in the U.S. (and abroad), the great incentive is to train students in quantitative methods and then to exploit that knowledge of statistical techniques to investigate topics using these high-quality data sets. It is worth noting that few of the quantitative techniques in these articles were innovative; most

researchers relied on well-established statistical methods, such as multiple regression, hierarchical linear modeling, and structural equation modeling. Thus, the sociology of education is mainly a borrower in terms of methodology; only four articles (two percent of the sample) focused specifically on advancing methods for the study of schooling systems.

The content analysis revealed that the collective mind of U.S. *Sociology of Education* is also highly oriented to primary and secondary education, rather than post-secondary education. Of the articles that could be classified by level of education addressed, 93 focused on primary/secondary education and 25 focused on post-secondary education, a ratio of almost 4:1 in favor of primary/secondary education. This orientation might seem skewed, given that at least three in five U.S. citizens now enrolls in a post-secondary institution at some point in their lives, and, further, that post-secondary achievements are highly connected to labor market outcomes. However, sociologists of education in the U.S. have followed the broader American public (and U.S. policy makers) in defining K-12 education as fundamental, both for equalizing opportunities and for building skills in critical spheres of cognitive and social development.

Now let us turn to the content of the articles. A very large proportion of articles concerned variation in student achievement, as measured by access to educational opportunities, scores on tests of reading or mathematics achievement, or educational attainment in degrees or years. These are very attractive dependent variables, since schooling is explicitly intended to encourage cognitive achievement and the attainment of valuable educational credentials. It is consequently of great interest for sociologists to try to understand with which populations and due to which methods of organization schools

are and are not succeeding. Moreover, variation is easy to measure for variables like these and a variety of factors may be relevant to explaining this variation, ensuring an almost limitless supply of relationships to investigate.

My findings about the collective mind in the sociology of education, from this broad topical point of view, are presented in Table 1.

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**Table 1**  
**Proportion of *Sociology of Education* Articles by Topical Category, 1999-2008**  
**(N=168 articles)**

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Proportion</u>
Inequality and Schools	42	25%
School Effects/ School Organization	33	20%
Non-Structural Sources of Achievement	28	17%
Culture/Ideology	27	16%
Comparative/Historical	17	10%
Labor Market Mechanisms/ Labor Market Outcomes	11	7%
State/Politics/Mobilization	9	5%
Methods	4	2%

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Only two of these eight topical areas – inequality and school effects/school organization -- were the subjects of at least one-fifth of articles. To a large degree, this reflects the core subjects of sociological analysis: inequality and social organization. We can gain more purchase on these two leading topics by looking at the more refined topical categories. Of the articles on inequality, 26 focused primarily on race and ethnicity, while 11 focused on gender, 7 focused on social class, and 5 focused on immigrants. These figures indicate that U.S. sociology of education is very much grounded in U.S. social relations. Race has been the pivotal division in American society and the issue of

black-white achievement gaps has been one of particular interest to American sociologists, following the influential work by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Philips on this topic in the late 1990s. Moreover, U.S. school policy has also been strongly oriented to reducing inequities by race, as evidenced by the legitimating language surrounding the U.S. “No Child Left Behind” Act of 2001, which sought to overcome “the soft bigotry of low expectations” for minority children. Surely, in most of Europe, immigration status is a more significant structural category and one would expect to see variation along these lines.

Other structural bases of inequality received less attention: Social class was thoroughly analyzed in previous generations, and the major advance in recent years has been the incorporation of wealth measures into achievement and attainment models, as in the work of Dalton Conley. Gender has a far more limited differentiating influence in the U.S. Indeed, as in the rest of the developed world, girls now greatly outdo boys in grades, verbal test scores, and college enrollment.

Articles studying the influence of school organization on achievement were nearly as common. In these articles, dimensions of variation in school organization – including socio-demographic composition of schools, school size, sector (private or public), tracking structure, and site-specific instructional styles – were analyzed for their associations with variations in student performance. Thus, the articles researched such topics as the connection between instructional activities and student engagement, school financing and achievement in urban school districts, school size and students’ psycho-emotional adjustment, and the connection between tracking, student effort, and student achievement.

Indeed, the interaction between school organization and social inequalities is an important thread running through the last decade of work in *The Sociology of Education*. Thus, for example, one article discussed how in socio-economically similar schools, greater concentrations of minority students leads to the raising, rather than the lowering, of expectations for higher level degrees. Another showed that, in comparative perspective, inequality between groups can widen in the initial phase of expanding educational opportunity, because the most advantaged groups are the first to exploit any new opportunities that policy changes offer.

The next largest group of articles belonged to the category that I have termed “non-structural sources of achievement.” Here I categorized articles about social structures, attitudes, and behaviors linked to school performance, but only distally related to the most important structural bases of social inequality in American society. In this category we see articles focusing on family structures such as cohabitation and divorce; behaviors such as timing of sexual initiation, obesity and drinking; and academic resources, such as effort and academic skills developed in prior schooling. We can contrast sociologist’s focus on structural versus non-structural bases of inequality, running over the last decade at a ratio of approximately 4:3 in favor of structural bases of inequality. Thus, one of the fault lines in studies of education divide those who place priority on categorical social inequalities and those who place priority on attitudes, behaviors, and practices that explain inter-stratum variation in achievement. This is a bigger issue in U.S. sociology generally, one that is relevant to the sociology of health behavior and the sociology of occupational advancement, as much as the sociology of education.

Why do we see this controversy? Many U.S. sociologists (particularly those who are closer to the center of the political spectrum) are impatient with the blunter forms of social determinism represented by those who root behavior in social structural advantages and disadvantages, and an equal or larger number of U.S. sociologists (particularly those who are closer to the left of the political spectrum) are impatient with those who focus on behavioral choices and effort to the relative exclusion of broader influences on educational outcomes due to structural inequalities.

Here I will indulge in an editorial comment: As in so many such controversies, one can, in theory, assimilate the two positions, using structural equation models, and many scholars have done so. Instead of choosing sides, scholars can take the position, for example, that inequality and individual behavior are both influences on achievement. Thus, the probability of putting great effort into schooling and accepting academic challenges is lower for members of disadvantaged groups, because of their location in the social structure, but the willingness to exert effort and accept challenges remains a strong predictor of achievement even after we hold social advantage constant. Not all are satisfied with this approach, however, either because they fear that it sidesteps the true significance of structural inequalities that affect large majorities, or, on the other side, because they find that it reifies structural inequalities that are subject to change with improved educational opportunities.

Moving back to the content categories in Table 1, we note that the U.S. *Sociology of Education* remains rooted in the “hard,” measurable realities of inequality, school organization, family structure, and individual behavioral choices. At the same time, like so much of the broader field of sociology, U.S. sociology of education has also

experienced its own “cultural turn” during the last decade, and we have begun to see many more “soft” articles that examine how cultural meanings influence school outcomes. Let me just mention a couple of these articles: In one, Regina Deil-Amen and James Rosenbaum showed that efforts to reduce stigma from remedial education have unintended consequences on students’ understandings of schooling by failing to provide realistic feedback on skill levels. In another, my students Mary F. Contreras and Michael T. Matthews and I described the socialization climate of primary schools, linking emphases on self-esteem and praise to U.S. consumer culture. These articles have the appeal of taking seriously the mental picture that the schooling institutions project and the mental pictures that students bring with them to schooling.

As we move down to the bottom half of Table 1, we become more aware of what is missing from U.S. sociology of education than what is present. More than 90% of articles were about schools in the United States, rather than about schooling in other countries, a level of nationalist focus that is perhaps surprising for a country whose leaders touted globalization so frequently during this period. Indeed, the insularity of U.S. *Sociology of Education* is more profound than even this figure suggests. A majority of the comparative articles were published because they shed light on issues in U.S. sociology of education, such as whether educational expansion reduces social inequality and why some systems are better able to incorporate minorities than others.

Other less represented topics are equally surprising. Since schooling is, above all, preparation for adult work and civic life, it may be surprising that fewer than 10 percent of the articles focused on labor market mechanisms or labor market transitions. And, of course, as we can see from this data, interest in the state or political groups as actors in

the construction of schooling (or as a beneficiary of schooling) is still weaker. The collective mind represented in *Sociology of Education* has distinctive interests and biases, and these interests evidently do not include most of the rest of the world, the U.S. capitalist market economy, or state-based policy coalitions struggling over the forms and functions of schooling.

We can gain a more detailed sense of what is emphasized and de-emphasized in the collective mind through further examination of the more refined topic categories. In Table 2, I report infrequent topics in *Sociology of Education* based on these more refined topical categories. Among the plausible topics for the journal, we see just 5 (of 168) articles on the effects of variation in teaching styles and practices; 5 articles on dropouts; 5 articles on students' extra-curricular activities; 4 articles on the sources and consequences of curricula; 3 articles on the education of elites; 3 articles on family structure and school achievement; 3 articles on religious schools; 3 articles on state examination systems; 2 articles on the effects of geographical mobility and school changing; and 1 article on group processes in the classroom.

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**Table 2**  
**Infrequent Subjects in *Sociology of Education*, 1999-2008**  
**(N=168)**

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Proportion</u>
Teaching Practices	5	3%
Dropouts	5	3%
Extra-curricular Activities	5	3%
Curriculum	4	2%
Education of Elites	3	2%
Family Structure	3	2%
Religious Schools	3	2%
State Examination Systems	3	2%

School Changing	2	1%
Group Processes in Class	1	>1%

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### *Theoretical vs. Empirical Engagements*

One conclusion I have drawn from reading a decade's worth of articles in *Sociology of Education* is that U.S. sociologists of education have relatively little regard for theory. The vast majority of articles can be described as empirical examinations of relationships between variables measured in national surveys. Many of the titles of the articles convey the authors' intent to examine empirical relationships, taking into account a standard battery of controls, to identify or to explore further heretofore unappreciated relationships. Thus, we have articles with titles like the following: "Gender, Obesity, and Education," "Tracking, Student Efforts, and Academic Achievement," or "High School Exit Exams and Dropouts." These articles might be pejoratively characterized, in C. Wright Mills' term, as "abstracted empiricism" – in other words, the investigation of sociological phenomenon without significant concern for theory testing or the accumulation of propositional knowledge about schooling and society.

At the same time, we might wish to reconsider the usefulness of the term "abstracted empiricism," because one common pattern found in these articles is the effort to engage, critique, or explain a previously posited empirical relationship, particularly one with important public policy implications. Thus, a number of writers dig into the causes of the educational gap between blacks and whites in the United States. Perhaps this form of investigation is not properly characterized as "abstracted empiricism"; instead, it is rooted in a real social problem with important policy implications. Here one

sees the evident interest in the field in the amelioration of the negative consequences of social inequalities, a common outlook among sociologists of education (indeed, sociologists generally) who ground their work in social reform aspirations rather than purely scientific motivations to develop theory to better understand the working of social relations and social institutions.

Not all of the articles were entirely atheoretical. Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory is tested and refined by several authors, some drawing on Annette Lareau's application of Bourdieu to family socialization practices. John W. Meyer's "world polity" theory is investigated by two authors. Michael Hout and Adrian Raftery's theory of maximally maintained inequality is subjected to investigation by two researchers. In one article, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis reconsider their theory of schooling in capitalist America in light of recent scholarship, finding evidence to support some but not all of its propositions of their well-known 1976 book. In another, Randall Collins' theory of credentialism is compared to human capital theory using the critical test case of employer sponsored vocational training. Joseph Berger and Morris Zelditch's expectations states theory influences a study of problem-solving groups. A very few articles introduce new theorizations; one is an effort to conceptualize the educational resources – technical vs. social – associated with different major subject fields and their links to the workplace demands in specific occupational labor markets.

More often authors drew on conceptual ideas (something different from theories) propounded by writers inside and outside the sociology of education and applied them (or critiqued them) in relation to current schooling patterns in the U.S. Thus, James Davis's "frog pond" effect -- the idea that it is better to be a big frog in a small pond -- is

subjected to analysis in one article. Robert Frank's idea of the "winner-take-all" society forms the framework for analysis in an article about highly-ranked U.S. secondary schools. One study applied Robert Merton's ideas about reference groups to the interactions of U.S. higher education institutions. In another, Michel Foucault's idea of the "carceral society" helped to frame an analysis of socialization messages in U.S. primary schools.

I identified only one ongoing debate in the journal related to a conceptual idea or theory. In the 10-year period, no fewer than five articles challenged the "oppositional culture" idea of John Ogbu – that highly-subordinated minority students develop counter-school culture attitudes and behaviors. *Sociology of Education* authors attacked this idea in a variety of ways: showing that minority-concentrated schools include more students with high aspirations, showing that prior skills, rather than social disadvantage, explain the development of attitudes consistent with oppositional culture, or exploring the ways that African American students manage dual identities – ambition to succeed combined with awareness of degrees of anti-intellectualism in their home environments.

It is unclear whether the near-absence of theory and theoretical debate in *Sociology of Education* reflects the weakness of existing theoretical perspectives or simply the much greater interest of sociologists of education in exploring the truth or falsity of posited empirical relationships regarding social problems related to schooling using sophisticated analytical techniques on high-quality data sets. Whatever one makes of this, it is clear that statistical knowledge and data collection technology has advanced much faster than theory in the sociology of education and that the leading graduate programs are teaching data manipulation skills and encouraging students to make their

careers by exploring under-investigated empirical relationships rather than working on testing or developing theory. In terms of the standard scientific model of theory-grounded knowledge, this is a problem; in terms of understanding the empirical world of schooling as it currently exists in one national context it may not be.

*Social and Intellectual Influences on the “Collective Mind”*

We might ask: What are the sources for the particular interests and silences in the collective mind of U.S sociology of education, as represented by its leading journal? I would provisionally point to five influences:

(1) The first has to do with talent recruitment. Sociologists are the most left-of-center group in U.S. academe. Issues of inequality and social justice are central to the current constitution of the discipline, and these concerns naturally take root in sub-disciplines concerned with the allocation of opportunities in society. School performance is, understandably, assumed to be the primary route to mobility in American society, and, as such, is also seen by sociologists as very important for fighting social ills related to poverty.

(2) Inter-generational transmission of research agendas also matter. The concerns of the field today reflect, in some measure, the concerns of leading scholars of the last generation: the field’s continuing interest in status attainment processes comes from the Wisconsin tradition of William H. Sewell and Robert Hauser, as carried forward by current scholars who were their students or close junior colleagues, such as Adam Gamoran and Michael Hout; the field’s interest in school organizational effects derives from the influences of the Hopkins and Chicago traditions of Willard Brookover, Robert

Dreeben and Charles Bidwell, as carried forward by current scholars, such as Anthony Bryk and Stephen Raudenbusch, both of whom are currently or were until recently located at the University of Chicago.

(3) Contemporary policy issues also play a role in shaping the “collective mind.” Once the Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips volume helped to focus scholarly attention on the “black-white test gap,” the likelihood that the causes of this gap would become a subject of intense interest in the field increased dramatically. The interest of the political left in closing this gap through high-stakes state examination systems contributes greatly to interest in this topic as well. Research support in the form of grants and fellowships follows from well supported policy interests.

(4) Another influence is clearly technological. As I have indicated, the availability of high quality national survey data and the diffusion of statistical techniques through graduate training programs and through the mass production and widespread diffusion of statistical software packages have cemented the quantitative bent of the discipline. This is true in spite of many notable contributions of qualitative researchers.

(5) Finally, substantive intellectual currents in the discipline (and, indeed, in the social sciences generally) clearly matter as well. For example, *Sociology of Education* has experienced its own, relatively modest “cultural turn,” inconceivable apart from the larger cultural turn in the social sciences inspired by the work of Clifford Geertz, Hayden White, Pierre Bourdieu, and others. This movement has led to the growth of the ASA section on the sociology of culture to a position as one of the largest sections in the Association.

*Conclusion: Notable Truncations*

I will conclude by considering U.S. sociology of education in relation to alternative “collective minds” that could, in theory, define the field. Even in such a flight of imagination, we should begin with stipulations. I will stipulate only one basic principle: the sociology of education is, in my definition, a sub-discipline which focuses on understanding the influences of society and social relations on educational practices and, conversely, the influences of educational practices on society and social relations.

One clear possibility is for a more international, comparative sociology of education. Unlike the founders of the discipline, U.S. sociologists have gravitated toward a narrow, nation-specific understanding of schooling. Such a change would require greatly reduced nationalism, broader historical and comparative training, and less parochial views about social relations and social institutions. Although one might hope for such an evolution in the field, it does not seem to be in the offing any time soon. I have tried to help push the field in this direction, with relatively little success. U.S. scholars remain, for the most part, fascinated by educational issues affecting their own society.

Another alternative conception would be to locate schooling in the context of non-school based educational influences and institutions. At the moment, we have a sociology of schooling, rather than a sociology of education. A broader sociology of education would certainly be less school focused, and instead compare schools with competing culture producing and knowledge creating institutions (such as religion and popular media) as influences on individual (and group) behavior and thought. As I noted in another work: “In adult life, the knowledge taught in school does not necessarily count

for more than other forms of knowledge, such as common sense, popular culture, merchandising, folklore, and religious belief...School knowledge might count more for those who run our institutions, but for the majority of people this is doubtful. Moreover, some of these other 'knowledge systems,' such as popular culture and religious traditions, have become more, not less important in shaping cognition." The advantage of focusing on schooling, of course, is that schools are brick and mortar places that can be readily accessed and studied.

The sub-discipline's one-sided focus on the society-to-school link creates a different sort of truncation. In the sociology of education, as currently constituted in the U.S., we see very few studies of the other side of the relationship: the school-to-society link – whether this be the effects of formal education on the structure of labor markets (through credentialism and professionalization), on culture (through the creation of tastes, values, awarenesses, and status cultures), or on individual behavior following the completion of schooling (through, for example, changes in parenting, religious or political participation). Variations in students' social backgrounds figure as inputs to schools, but levels and types of schooling only rarely figure as inputs to society or culture. A few scholars, such as Paul Kingston, have pursued the school-to-society link in recent years, but their work is marginal to the main lines of thought in the sub-discipline.

In sum, today's sociology of education in the United States is the study of the effects of social structure and school organization on educational achievement. These are undoubtedly very important subjects. But conceptions of alternative collective minds may suggest the limits of the current constitution of the field. In the U.S., ours has been a

nationalist sociology of schooling, not a sociology of all forms of education in global society. It has, in addition, been a sociology of schooling's dependence on social inequalities, not of the dependence of society on the production of the carriers of school socialization and knowledge. A more rounded perspective would, I believe, lead to a stronger appreciation of education's contribution to the construction of society and culture – one that might keep more of us optimistic about the great social enterprise we study, even as, true to our roots in social reform, we remain dismayed about its failures to provide equal opportunities for all.

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I thank you for your warm welcome and attentive consideration of this report on the doings of scholars working across a large ocean from you. I wish you the very best in continuing to construct your own vibrant collective mind, a project to which this meeting will, I expect, measurably contribute.