

REFLECTIONS ON DR. CLARK'S TEACHING
AND APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

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This paper offers a unique opportunity to formally pay tribute to one of Dr. Clark's many contributions to sociology: that of sharpening the clinical method through the intensive use of such concepts as value premises, attitudes, and definitions of situations by the applied sociologist. Moreover, he stressed the concepts of latent and manifest functions and indicated the potential of social systems theory in sociological analyses. While he taught aspiring sociologists to consider these variables as influencing the action of groups or individuals, Dr. Clark also clearly pointed out that the sociologist must: 1) recognize the values, attitudes, and conceptions that he carries into a situation, 2) control them if possible, and 3) be aware of their impact on the groups or individuals under study. These conceptions were presented as being interactional because they only became manifest in some type of social relationship. In this respect Dr. Clark might be viewed as an exponent of the "interactionist school;" however, the breadth of his thinking and the keen intellectual stimulation he provided his students went beyond this and included the thought of social systems theory, human relations concepts, and psychoanalytic theory. His intellectual explorations covered other areas as well, and these fields are not meant to be the whole story.

Coupled with the emphasis on utilizing theory and concepts, Dr. Clark stressed an approach involving the direct observation of the phenomena under consideration. He required the aspiring sociologist to be saturated with information about the problem he planned to investigate or work with. Also, Dr. Clark suggested that information should be derived, if at all possible, from first hand experience with the particular problem under consideration; and emphasizing intimate and concrete familiarity with it. Then too, Dr. Clark urged the sociologist to respect his problem, be patient in working with it, and maintain a self

critical awareness of his own values and actions. Dr. Clark's own behavior was open, undefensive, candid and friendly; a style consistent with his teaching about the use of the clinical method.

At any rate, it was clear to his students that the major aims he sought from an improved clinical approach were twofold: to facilitate research (the selection of viable research questions, improved data collection and more incisive analysis and interpretation of the data) and to fund social science knowledge; and to improve applied sociology (social planning, development of public policy on social problems, working toward the solution of social problems). He saw these activities as producing an improved general, as well as an improved applied sociology.

I came to the Department as a graduate student vitally interested in acquiring knowledge for use. Though somewhat vocational, it was an orientation forged during several years experience in Marine Corps personnel work and direct work with delinquents in a state training school. I found Dr. Clark's lectures and seminars on social psychology, collective behavior, human relations and research methods, stimulating and rewarding, particularly as they provided insight into, and new ways of viewing, aspects of my experience that were enigmas, or that lacked clarity. In retrospect, for example, I observed that: some delinquents' diagnoses at the training school had been greatly influenced by the status relationship among the staff (the staff members having the greatest prestige would prevail and the psychopathology found in the case studies played only a small part in the decision making); the overwhelming commitment to individual personality theory by the clinicians, had obscured the social meaning of some of the delinquents' behavior; and lower class delinquents had been placed into middle class homes by middle class staff because the values of those homes were consistent with the staff's values. Insights also emerged from the course work on the previous Marine Corps experience. For example, the assignments of marines to jobs had been influenced by informal criteria, such as the social characteristics of the men, along with the formal criteria, and the recommendation of enlisted men for promotion had been influenced by the informal social organization of the men in their barracks along with the formally stated requirements.

Today, it seems as if such insights should have been made routinely, but, it is important to recognize that they followed the sociological learning. Moreover, developing such understanding in retrospect and removed from the action is substantially simpler than making such analyses at the actual site of the action. On the question of developing analytical skill within the framework of an action situation, Dr. Clark pointed to the possibility of involving one's self differentially in such circumstances. He indicated that varying one's degree of involvement in a situation allows direct participation during the moments of greatest involvement and analysis and reconsideration during instances of less

involvement. Such an approach permits immediate analysis of a situation as well as participation in it.

To describe the University of Kansas as a utopia for learning — one where the student learns all that is necessary and sufficient and then proceeds to solve the world's problems is not my intention. However, the Department's characteristic stress on scholastic excellence, academic freedom combined with responsibility, and substance as well as method in sociology was complementary to learning the clinical method. This learning has proven useful in my work as an applied sociologist, initially in delinquency work as the head of Minnesota's institutions for delinquent children and, in this area, for the U.S. Children's Bureau, and later in the field of manpower as the Executive Secretary of the President's Committee on Youth Employment, and Chief of the Planning and Research Division in the Department of Labor's Bureau of Work-Training Programs.

In these several positions, as in graduate school, Dr. Clark's teaching has proven to be highly useful. I will discuss one of the many problems administrators face in attempting to get maximum performance from the staff as well as providing them excellent conditions of work. This problem is that of relating the informal and formal organizations. Ideally, understanding of the administrative relationships within the formal system and working with them reduces the likelihood of subversive informal interaction. Further, it must be recognized that when significant decisions habitually derive from the informal system, the effectiveness of the formal administrative structure will be jeopardized. Yet in trying to develop the most productive and satisfied staff the administrator may still consider using the informal system. Whether the administrator decides to utilize it to expand and humanize the information transmitted by official channels (up and down the formal lines of communication and authority) or go beyond such a limited goal is problematic. Even judicious attempts to use the informal system to help a reasonably well administered organization's communications may go awry. Its full malignancy is realized only in an organization where the administration is grossly at fault, and where distrust, uncertainty, fear and jockeying for power are common place.

Thus to consider using the informal organization beyond providing it simpler kinds of information from time to time is to entertain conflict, disruption and even calamity along with such efficiency as the administrator may expect. Moreover, the administrator should be aware that some unanticipated consequences will undoubtedly occur from the direct involvement of the informal system — consequences that he cannot predict or plan for. Reactions will flow from the disturbance of the total organization's equilibrium — its power, communications, work and other structures. Moreover, the informal organization may contain certain explosive elements. Its members may be attracted by shared

dissatisfactions, neurotic problems over authority and lack of competency along with their common positive interests. These individual problems coupled with a structural disturbance may produce substantial reactions for the administrator.

Yet, the administrator frustrated by the rigidity, unimaginativeness and lack of vitality of the formal organization may use the informal organization directly by assigning work to it occasionally. Clearance and tact with the formal structure may avoid conflict, especially if the assignments are to individuals or groups having competence lying beyond that of their immediate supervisor yet within the expertise of the administrator. On the other hand, the administrator may decide to confront the formal organization with its shortcomings through deliberate and unceremonious use of the informal system. In the latter instance, a conflict situation is certain to be stimulated; however, such a possibility should not be discounted in the case of a benign involvement of the informal structure.

An administrator may work directly with the informal system in order: 1) to achieve limited tasks through gently tapping the skills of the informal system which are stifled by the formal system or 2) to achieve a confrontation of the formal structure with its inadequacy by explicit use of informal system. Criteria for deciding to work in this way remain to be developed and tested. However, any administrator in deciding to work with the informal structure would surely be influenced by his values on the use and abuse of human beings in a work setting. The administrator will have to square his evaluation of the formal organization's strength to accomplish the work of the division and the personal comfort of the staff working within that framework, against his estimate of the informal organization's capability and the satisfaction of the staff working there. Further, in respect to the staff's state of well-being, the administrator will have to weigh any projected gains against the tension and discomfort precipitated by the conflict of posturing the informal against the formal. Then, too, he cannot discount the probability that the energies sprung from the conflict may be diverted to destructive behavior rather than pursuing the work of the organization.

The extent to which these values are explicit to the administrator should influence the rationality of his choice. In addition, other variables that might influence his decisions are: the personnel and related policies of the larger organization, of which the division is but one part; the leadership styles practiced by the administrators in the echelons above the division level; and the intra and extramural influences of the formal and informal systems on the administration of the division. It is important to enlarge on the last point because either system in its external relations could have liaisons to top management, exclusive of the division head. Such liaisons may produce action cues

for the administrator of the division. Yet what he should do with these cues, especially if they come via the informal communication system is problematic. Minimumly, the administrator must question the soundness of the cues because the division's problem may have been misrepresented to top management or top management's ideas may have been distorted.

In addition to these more general criteria for deciding whether to involve the informal organization are the immediate features of a situation. The administrator must be cognizant of those, especially as his previous actions may have contributed to their having been generated. For example, the attractions and repulsions that emerge out of the daily interactions between the administrator and his staff may precipitate some problems. The administrator may gain special satisfaction from working through the informal system, or at least with certain individuals in it and thus invite or manipulate its direct involvement. Or a branch of his division may perform the work in which he is especially interested. Consequently, he may make direct contact with it. Then too, in his daily interaction with the staff, the administrator, in a moment of anger or disappointment in the formal system might spontaneously, and perhaps spitefully, engage the informal. To encourage the administrator to be sensitive to such problems, to be deliberative in his approach and self critical of his results, however, is not to press for an obsessive approach. Such procrastination, vacillation and constant doubting could have as debilitating effect on the organization as an impulsive thoughtless approach.

As indicated earlier, Dr. Clark's contribution to my consideration of such problems has been substantial. More broadly, I hope that I have indicated the extent of a teacher's influence on his student. Finally, and consistent with Dr. Clark's point of view, such problems as I have described can contribute to general sociology, if properly studied, as well as contribute to more effective and satisfying places of work.