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The Minister for Education and Sociology of Education: Australian Textbooks 1970-2005

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Relations between Ministers for Education and Faculties of Education have often been uneasy. The history of Australian teacher education readily attests to this (Hyams, 1979). This paper uses comments by Australia's then Federal Minister for Education, Dr Brendon Nelson, on the place and utility of sociology in teacher education courses as a catalyst to examine the content of social foundations of education textbooks for the period 1970-2005.

Tensions between Ministers for Education and Faculties of Education are not confined to Australia. For example, in his Presidential Address to the 2005 Annual Conference of the British Education Research Association Whitty (2005: 1) described the uneasy relationship between educational research, educational policy and educational practice in Britain, Australia and the United States. Whitty observed that in the 1990s politicians questioned the value and quality of the work of educational sociologists who worked in universities.

It was not only politicians of the 1990s who cast doubts on the work of educational sociologists. For example, Woods (1985: 51), one of Britain's leading educational sociologists, observed that sociology had not served teachers well. Woods argued that 'its theoretical abstraction seemed remote from teachers' hard realism, and its terms of debate difficult to comprehend'. Woods (1985: 51-60) suggested

hat the problem for educational sociology stemmed from its critical and subversive nature. Its findings offered little comfort to teachers struggling to survive in schools. Similarly Barcan (1993: 157-215), a leading Australian educational historian, noted that much of sociology of education lacked knowledge of the history of education, lacked experience of school life, was overcommitted to radical change and was written in a language that exceeded not only the understanding of many teachers but teacher education students and academics themselves.

Australian State and Federal Governments have recently commissioned parliamentary inquiries or released parliamentary reports into the suitability of university provided pre-service teacher education and training. For example, in Victoria, *Step Up, Step In, Step Out – A report on the inquiry into the suitability of pre-service teacher training in Victoria* was released in 2005 (Herbert, 2005). This report included in its appendixes the *Victorian Institute of Teaching Draft Standards for Graduating Teachers*. This draft standard stipulated that teachers must 'understand the social, political and ethical dimensions of education and within that framework are able to articulate a vision or philosophy of the role of a teacher and demonstrate attitudes which support professional behaviour' (Victorian Institute of Teaching, Teachers, 2004). Faculties of Education pre-service teacher education and training programs

have normally responded to such requests by teaching institutes responsible for the accreditation of teacher education programmes and teacher registration with courses based on the history of education, philosophy of education, comparative education and sociology of education. These courses have always occupied a problematic place in teacher education pre-service courses.

On 17 February 2005, Dr Nelson announced a national inquiry into the training of teachers. He claimed Faculties of Education were often 'described to him as quasi-sociology departments'. He added that while he was a strong supporter of the humanities and social sciences, he was concerned that there was possibly too much emphasis on the sociology of education in teacher education courses.

An examination of a selection of the principal textbooks used in Australian teacher education foundations of education courses between 1970 and 2005 allows us to test the validity of Dr Nelson's claims. Furthermore, such an analysis enables us to ascertain whether, with respect to textbooks used in foundations of education courses, there was a predominance of educational sociology textbooks. This analysis also provides an understanding of the major focus and orientation of the textbooks used throughout the period. In the discussion that follows, textbooks are discussed in chronological order.

1970-1980

The period saw twelve Australian textbooks published for social foundations of education courses. Six of these were very specifically sociological, three explored educational issues within a loose sociological framework, three were comparative with sociological underpinnings and one concentrated on issues for beginning teachers. Within these broad categories, the books' orientations varied from functionalist sociology to critical and radical sociology and classroom teacher orientation. The following discussion looks at each text of the period in more detail.

Katz and Browne, *Sociology of Education* (1970), was promoted by the authors as an indispensable book for academics, teachers, students and all concerned with the future of Australian education whether administrator, politician, journalist or parent. The authors provided an Australian overview of the education system. They noted that previously students had been forced to transpose to Australia overseas research. Katz and Brown claimed that in comparison to the many historically-based studies then available, there were few sociologically- based studies of Australian education. Their book analysed and described the Australian education system as it responded to a period of rapid change. Katz and Browne noted that education was a major institution that was expected to contribute to the demands of the industrial state and to society's future development and progress.

Maclaine and Selby Smith, *Fundamental Issues in Australian Education* (1971), examined major problems in Australian education. They argued that the key to a civilised society was dependent on improvements in education. They claimed (Maclaine and Selby Smith, 1971: ix) that it was necessary for Australian educators to be 'bold and constructive in their thinking' as Australia has reached a point where its educational needs differed from other nations.

Consequently it was necessary to produce teachers who were able to work beyond the 'immediate problems and see some distance into the future' (Maclaine and Selby Smith, 1971: x).

Browne and Simpkins, *Social Science Perspectives on Australian Education* (1972), drew on the disciplines of economics, politics and sociology. The book assisted students to understand education as a social institution by focusing attention on the relationships between education and Australian society. They argued (Browne and Simpkins, 1972: Preface) that 'shaping instructional practice to meet the demands of students and society demands insights into the way in which education responds to social requirements and participates in social change'. They noted there was a lack of authoritative Australian sources, which meant that the study of education in Australia had been confined to comparative education and the history of education. They cautioned (Browne and Simpkins,1972: 28) against 'the dangers of exciting unreal expectations about the sort of knowledge which the social sciences can expect to supply'.

Simpkins and Miller, *Changing Education: Australian Viewpoints* (1972), analysed changes in curriculum and instruction from the perspective of issues confronting Australia schools. The book provided students with insights into Australian educational issues by examining recent ideas and practices. They argued (Simpkins and Miller, 1972: 1-2)that individual and social factors had to be recognised in school practice, for school instruction was influenced by factors within the pupils as well as internal and external social contexts.

Partridge, *Society, Schools and Progress in Australia* (1973), was a broad exposition of Australian education and its policies. The book emphasised key principles, practices and assumptions that influenced the history of state education, and analysed how an inherited English system of schooling had changed to meet Australian demands.

Mackie, *The Beginning Teacher (1973)*, was a problem-based book using classroom-based case studies. Unlike most of the others of this period, Mackie's book was more classroom and teacher focused. She argued (1973: i) that the best preparation for teaching was to ask oneself, 'How would I deal with that'? She noted that teacher education students often complained that they had not been taught various things even when they had. She responded that they had been taught but had not learned (Mackie, 1973: i). She argued (Mackie, 1973: viii) that teaching was not learnt as a series of actions, even though some things were learnt by doing them. To proceed without theory was to proceed without the benefit of the experience of others 'and to make mistakes with actual pupils which might well have been made and corrected in the safer situations of discussion and speculation' (Mackie, 1973: viii). Mackie wrote for beginning teachers but thought that her book would also interest parents and experienced teachers.

Jones, *Education in Australia* (1974), was similar to but less detailed than Partridge (1972) and analysed (Jones, 1974: 8) the development of Australian education and the influence of common political values and the nation's political structure on education and schooling.

Maclaine, *Australian Education: Progress, Problems, Prospects* (1974), was a detailed examination of Australian education similar to that of Partridge. His historically-based approach illuminated the existing education system.

Browne, Foster and Simpkins, *A Guide to the Sociology of Australian Education* (1974), differed from conventional introductory foundations of education texts of the time. It provided an Australian examination of education and showed teacher education students how to relate this to pupils, schools and society. The book was in three parts. Part One discussed theoretical models and basic sociological concepts; Part Two comprised study units on key social issues affecting educational policy, the operation of schools and academic performance of students; and Part Three was concerned with research design and suggestions for collecting data.

Andersen and Cleverley, *Exploring Education*, (1975) was an interdisciplinary text. The authors challenged not only then-current educational and schooling practices but also radical educational theories and practices. They noted that many educational concerns extended beyond Australia and needed to be understood in an international setting (Andersen and Cleverley, 1975: vii). They argued that their book was equipped to resist the problem of knowledge obsolescence, which they claimed characterised other books of the time. Certainly their use of historical and contemporary photographs was a novel departure in textbook presentation.

Edgar, *Sociology of Australian Education: A Book of Readings* (1975), saw the education system was a key factor in the social construction of reality. Consequently it had to be examined to determine how it influenced the prevailing social structure. For Edgar (1975: xi) education was an assault upon the child. The value of such a perspective for teacher education students who were going to work in the Australian schools was very likely problematic.

Browne and Foster, *Sociology of Education* (1976), saw their sociology of education textbook challenging 'the long established disciplines of philosophy, history and psychology of education'. (Browne and Foster, 1976: xi). However, they noted there were still noticeable gaps in areas that they examined. Furthermore, they observed that the existing economic and social climate meant that such courses were particularly vulnerable (Browne and Foster, 1976: xi). They argued that their text allowed the identification of characteristics that encouraged or prevented learning; highlighted the importance of institutional patterns in the formation of individual differences; showed the complex nature of the transmission of knowledge; and provided theoretical and methodological contributions to teacher training and education.

Browne and Foster claimed to provide a realistic picture of education in both Australia and New Zealand. This, they argued, was achieved by firstly developing an understanding of the macro level and then proceeding to look inside educational institutions. The authors provided a separate teacher/student guide that accompanied the textbook. This was divided into six sections to parallel those in the main text. Each section had suggestions for teaching and learning activities and materials to facilitate those activities. The authors noted that students needed

to be active learners. Some of the questions, however, make one wonder how far removed the guide and book were from students' real concerns and how justified are the reservations that politicians and policy makers have about the relevance of sociology of education courses to teacher education programs. For example, in their student guide (Browne and Foster, 1976: 3) provided the following questions:

Outline some of the basic differences between the approaches to educational decision making in New Zealand and Australia.

Discuss Bate's contention that the effects of cultural transmission are significant, for the (rational/technical) model employs certain assumptions about cultural transmission, and attempts to constrain teachers' and pupils' actions within the epistemological, cognitive and social limits of that model.
(Browne and Foster, 1976: 3).

D'Urso and Smith, *Changes, Issues and Prospects in Australian Education* (1978), claimed that Australia faced major changes in its educational structure and consequently students of education required the extensive background material provided by their text. They attempted to introduce students to important national issues by blending the theory and policy of education with both problems and practices.

The above discussion shows that during the 1970s, sociologically-based textbooks dominated those available for the teaching of Australian social foundations of education courses in teacher education programs. However, this discussion also shows that within this sociologically-dominant approach, there was a variety of theoretical positions. Additionally, there were sometimes attempts to make the textbooks more relevant to teacher education students and their pragmatic concerns. Whether this was achieved was, of course, another issue.

1980-1990

During this period, four sociology of education textbooks and one textbook that used a comparative education framework were published for Australian teacher education courses. The four sociology of education textbooks ranged from comprehensive and generalist introductory texts (which introduced students to all the major sociology of education perspectives) to textbooks that strongly espoused particular theoretical positions. In this latter category, one text was based on the critical theory of Habermas; another was neo-Marxist in orientation; a third was influenced heavily by interactionist perspectives.

Francis, *Teach to the Difference* (1981), was a problem-based analysis of teaching. Francis compared Australian classrooms with those in Third World countries. His rationale (Francis, 1981: 2) rested on what he labelled the 'cultural context' of teaching. He argued that students brought with them to the classroom particular cultural baggage, which needed to be accounted for by classroom teachers and schools. He claimed that teachers who taught to the difference recognised that a valid aim for schooling was to assist students become productive and happy in their different job aspirations, different race memberships, different religious affiliations and different languages (Francis, 1981: 28). His comparative education perspective, he believed, encouraged teachers to

'teach to the difference' rather than teaching to what he saw was the spurious goal of middle-class aspirations and middle-class education for all. Francis's philosophy, expressed in this book, was in stark contrast to those foundation of education texts that argued for radical social change. Not long after his book was published, Francis left university teaching to return to secondary school teaching. The same did not happen to any of those who wrote the more critical and revolutionary texts.

Foster, *Australian Education: A Sociological Perspective* (1981), was the first single-authored comprehensive sociology of Australian education textbook. She encouraged students (Foster, 1981: xiii) to move beyond the purely descriptive to the explanatory. She feared that she had been too ambitious in her goals and realised that 'only the reaction of teachers and students who use it can throw light on that' (Foster, 1981: xiii). The revisions in the second (1987) edition, which simplified the book, suggested she had been. She reported that these changes responded to student comments. The second edition was easier to comprehend, included three chapters on the implications for teachers and teaching and placed greater emphasis on school and classroom application. The second edition still claimed that students needed to be introduced to theory and methodology to enable them to understand the education system effectively (Foster, 1987: iv).

King and Young, *A Systematic Sociology of Australian Education* (1986), introduced beginning students to both sociology and sociology of education. King and Young argued that their book was unlike existing texts, which dealt with a series of separate issues and perspectives and were most suited to students who had a general introduction to sociology. Their book was more unified and offered an analysis that transcended the debates between different theoretical positions by pointing out possibilities for educational action. King and Young warned that their beginning chapters were particularly difficult and required repeated reading to master. The book was based on the critical theory of Habermas and much of the language reflected this, as the following passage indicates (King and Young, 1986: 28):

Now the crucial difference between reflexive theorising and non-reflexive theorising, so critical theorists believe, is that the former can avoid the total gap between theory and practice that often occurs in either control-oriented action or communicative action due to the separation in actual time and space of law and manipulation of conditions, message and understanding. This difference arises out of the fact that, under certain conditions, reflection on the historical formation of social relations, and in an intertwined way, on the biographical formation of our selves within that network of relations, becomes, simultaneously, both theory and practice.

Perhaps this is the kind of material that politicians and others had in mind when they questioned the value of sociology of education.

Easthope, Maclean & Easthope, *The Practice of Teaching: A Sociological Perspective* (1986: xiii), noted that research in Australia and overseas had highlighted the particular problems and concerns of beginning teachers. They were well aware that many first-year teachers complained that their initial teacher education had not prepared them

adequately to cope with the realities of teaching. They understood (Easthope, Maclean & Easthope, 1986: xiii) that the most criticised subjects in teacher preparation degrees were foundation courses, which were seen by students as too theoretical. Easthope, Maclean and Easthope believed that sociology of education for teacher education students should not be overly theoretical and insensitive to the concerns of beginning teachers. Their book was written to bridge the theory-practice gap. It used the authors' experience as classroom teachers, teacher educators and sociology of education academics to write a new type of sociology of education textbook. The book was intended for pre-service and beginning teachers who had no background in sociology. It was structured to give teacher education students information, understanding and techniques to assist them to become competent classroom teachers. Their book allegedly differed in another respect as well. Not only did the authors make sociology practical but they also made it interesting to read and study for its own sake (Easthope, Maclean & Easthope, 1986: xiv). The text concentrated on the teacher in the classroom and the school and on day-to-day teaching issues. It was written and produced to make it appealing to students: key issues were made in highlighted points and sociological jargon was avoided (and appeared only in the highlighted material and not in the body of the text); theoretical stances were not discussed in any detail; and there was ample use of cartoons, poems and extracts from works of fiction (Easthope, Maclean & Easthope, 1986: xiv). The writers did this to make the content more accessible and identifiable to student teachers, to illustrate particular viewpoints and

concepts and to present ideas more powerfully than was done in the conventional research literature. The authors suggested that the readers could only judge whether they had succeeded. They invited readers to write and tell them and to forward examples from their own teaching or reading so that their next edition would have a higher proportion of Australian and New Zealand material.

Henry, Knight, Lingard and Taylor, *Understanding Schooling: An Introductory Sociology of Australian Education* (1988), was an introductory text in the sociology of education aimed primarily at pre and in-service teacher education students. Responding to the complaints of classroom teachers that theory should be relevant and useful each chapter pointed out ways to improve practice. The authors (Henry et al., 1988: vii) wrote their book as 'a reaction against the often-used assertion to beginning teachers that they would be better if they forgot the theory of education since they are in the real world now'. The book was neo-Marxist in orientation, claiming that such accounts illuminated the repressive nature of schooling for many students (Henry et al., 1988: 13). The rationale of the book was a desire to understand the world in order to change it (Henry et al., 1988: 16). However, the authors conceded that schools by themselves could not change society, even if they assisted students to be critical towards society and its institutions (Henry et al., 1998: 16).

The above discussion shows that in the period 1980-1990, sociologically-based textbooks once again dominated those available for the teaching of social foundations of education courses in Australian teacher education programs.

However, what this discussion also shows is that within this sociologically-dominant approach there were variations. In addition, there were some attempts to make the textbooks more relevant to teacher education students and their pragmatic concerns. Whether or not this was achieved is a matter for conjecture.

1990-2005

During the last period considered, six books were published. Five were concerned specifically with the sociology of education, while the sixth centred on beginning teaching within a loose post0modern sociological framework. In the first group, dominant perspectives tended to be radical and reformist, with authors being influence by a range of theorists, including Habermas, Gramsci, Althusser and Marx.

Saha and Keeves, *Schooling and Society in Australia: Sociological Perspectives* (1990), analysed the social structures and processes out of which the Australian education system evolved. The book aimed to provide a 'state-of-the-art-summary of the sociology of schooling in Australia' (Saha and Keeves, 1990: xiii). The authors provided only an introductory examination of Australian schooling and were aware that more research and analysis were needed.

Foster and Harman, *Australian Education: A Sociological Perspective* (1992), was the third edition of Foster's book first published in 1981. Foster and Harman stressed that the book was not about the sociology of teaching, which they viewed as a sub-speciality of education. The range of sociological perspectives in their book was expanded to include a feminist viewpoint, activities and questions for students

were updated and expanded and there were more references to Australian and international research. Foster and Harman (1992: viii) wrote that as 'sociological consciousness knows no national or cultural boundaries, it [was] important that students go beyond the basic content', which was biased toward Australian material. They argued (Foster and Harman, 1992: viii) that the outlook in the book was essentially optimistic. However, perhaps anticipating the comments of many students and perhaps even ministers of education, they admitted that looking at education in a sociological way might not be a comfortable experience because of sociology's 'subversive quality' (Foster and Harman, 1992: 2).

Hatton, *Understanding Teaching: Curriculum and the Social Construction of Schooling* (1994), was a unique textbook because it brought together curriculum and social theorists. She emphasised (Hatton, 1994: xvi) that teaching was, for her, a complex social, political and ethical activity that was ultimately concerned with social justice. The rationale for her book centred on a number of premises. Firstly, if educational theorists provided powerful critiques of education but failed to show how practice might be improved, they were unhelpful to beginning teachers. Secondly, the notion that a discussion of teaching should be presented simply for beginning teachers and 'that its complexities, dilemmas and contradictions should remain unaddressed or even hidden until beginning teachers ... have a few years' teaching experience and have put their survival concerns to rest' was rejected as 'demeaning and fundamentally wrong' (Hatton, 1994: xvi). Thirdly, she argued that while many beginning teachers often saw such courses and teacher

educators who taught them as irrelevant and lacking in credibility, teachers should be exposed to these courses at the start of their training. This was the most appropriate place to develop knowledge and appropriate characteristics of reflective teachers.

Welch, *Australian Education: Reform or Crisis?* (1996), focused on the scale and direction of the changes that had occurred in Australian education by the use of general theories about education and society. The book offered all involved in education an account that would help their understanding of the changes in education. This would assist them to ensure that such changes were not used to reduce 'democratic possibilities for individuals' and for the wider Australian society (Welch, 1996: viii). He used the theoretical framework of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory developed by Habermas (Welch, 1996: xii). He also focused on the increasing internationalisation of education and the fact that Australian education could not be seen in isolation.

Symes and Preston, *Schools and Classroom: A Cultural Studies Analysis of Education* (1997), was an introductory polemical text. Althusser and Gramsci, other versions of Marxism and post-1968 social theory provided the theoretical underpinnings. The book drew on philosophy, sociology, history and psychology, but was not representative of one particular discipline of education, being more or less interdisciplinary in nature. According to the authors, it was a 'gadfly text', which sought to challenge common assumptions about education and its practice in the hope that its readers would work for change in classrooms and in education more generally (Symes and Preston, 1992: xiv).

They (Symes and Preston, 1992: xii) lamented the neglect of theory in Australian teacher education and the emphasis on the technical rather than the political dimensions of teaching. They claimed that 'teacher education needs to be more theoretical and less technical' (Symes and Preston, 1992: xiv). They recognised that teachers, who were especially pragmatic and mainly concerned with classroom practice, viewed educational theory with suspicion. They stressed the novel features of their book: the provision of endnotes that were intended to be a supplementary text; the use of 'antipodean literature' (as this had come of age and represented a distinctive tradition); the recognition that insights in education were derived from films, novels, newspapers and documentaries; and the inclusion of a glossary (as learning a new discipline was like learning a new language).

In the second edition there were improvements in style and presentation, with heavy editing reducing its 'obfuscatory language and convoluted style' (Symes and Preston, 1997, x). They hoped that this edition was 'far more user friendly and inviting in its presentation– more in tune with the intellectual sensibilities of a generation of students who are more used to visual than verbal forms of presentation, and who are not used to consulting dictionaries or reading long sentences' (Symes and Preston, 1997: x).

Also added to the end of each chapter were tutorial and field activities to make the text more useful. The authors hypothesised (Symes and Preston, 1997: xiv) that the book would annoy two classes of people among its intended audiences: purist post-structuralist and post-modern readers would see it as oversimplified

and teachers would not like the picture of schooling that was portrayed. It probably did all that and more.

Groundwater-Smith, Cusworth and Dobbins, *Teaching: Challenges and Dilemmas* (1998), was written for intending primary and secondary teachers and emphasised the challenging and satisfying nature of teaching. The book argued that teaching was more than a set of skills, for to be an effective teacher required reflection and sustained effort (Groundwater-Smith, et al., 1998: ix). The book was a practical guide that used theoretically-grounded case studies and anecdotes to illustrate its arguments. The aim was neither to mystify the profession nor to make teaching so obscure that the work was impossible. However, they suggested that the primary school should be read as a text and 'every text contains within it some elements which would undermine its meaning. Finding the point where the text was fissured was essential to deconstruction. There were no fixed conclusions or arbitrary operating assumptions' (Groundwater -Smith et al., 1998: ix).

Allen, *Sociology of Education: Possibilities and Practices* (2004), argued that teachers needed to understand the social context of education. The book presented various sociological perspectives with the aim of fostering informed change in educational practice (Allen, 2004: xi). The book stated that to ignore social theory in education was 'to step outside in winter naked': one may cope briefly but not in the long term (Allen, 2004: 4). Sociology of education was said to foster a better understanding of socio-cultural influences and their effect on educational outcomes and this allowed for the construction of more appropriate

educational programs for students. The book began with a summary of key issues of each chapter, followed by the sketch of a relevant scenario and questions based on it. The book was written in 'a language appropriate to those who are new to studying sociology of education as well as those with a continued interest in new developments' (Allen, 2004: ix). A glossary was provided to assist with the new language, concepts and perspectives and key words were highlighted in the body of the text.

The preceding discussion shows that during the period 1990-2005, sociologically-based textbooks dominated those available for the teaching of social foundations of education courses in Australian teacher education programs.

However, what this discussion also shows is that within this sociologically-dominant approach there were several theoretical positions. In addition, there were attempts to make the textbooks more relevant to teacher education students and their pragmatic concerns.

CONCLUSION

Australian social foundation texts for Australian teacher education programs during the period 1970-2005 were mostly sociologically based or heavily influenced by sociological perspectives. This examination of the principal textbooks used confirms to some extent Minister Nelson's claims about the influence of sociology of education in Australian teacher education programs, at least insofar as it dominated the textbooks used in core parts of teacher education programs.

Between 1970 and 1980, of 12 Australian textbooks published for social foundations of education courses, six were very specifically

sociological, three explored educational issues within a loose sociological framework, three were comparative with sociological underpinnings and one concentrated on issues for beginning teachers. Within these broad categories, the books' orientation varied from functionalist sociology to critical and radical sociology and a classroom teacher orientation.

Between 1980 and 1990, four Australian sociology of education textbooks and one textbook that used a comparative education framework were published. The sociology of education books ranged from comprehensive and generalist introductory texts (which introduced students to all the major sociology of education perspectives) to those that espoused strongly particular theoretical positions. In this latter category, one text was based on the critical theory of Habermas, another was neo-Marxist in orientation and a third was influenced heavily by interactionist perspectives.

Between 1990 and 2005, of six Australian books published, five of these were specifically concerned with the sociology of education and the sixth centred on beginning teaching within a loose post-modern sociological framework. In the first group, the dominant perspectives tended to be radical and reformist, with authors being influenced by a range of theorists, including Habermas, Gramsci, Althusser and Marx.

Only a very small number of textbooks written for Australian social foundations of education courses during the period 1990-2005 were not sociological in orientation. That is not to say that these exceptions did not make major and important impacts. However, their impact as well as that of the impact of those textbooks more

overtly sociological in orientation which have been discussed above must be the subject of further research and analysis.

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