

phasis on a sincere attempt to resolve the differences in thinking represented. Those particularly who worked on the panel were quite overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issues involved. The group agreed that it was impossible to determine in a few days of class discussion the final decision which should be reached regarding the controversial national health program. They were ready to maintain, however, that a satisfac-

tory answer is not so simple as partisan groups would have us believe.

Teachers need fully to recognize the need for teaching controversial issues, to understand the essential elements in a workable program, and then to devote their utmost efforts toward developing still better methods and procedures for encouraging the discussion of these issues. The challenge is ours. Will we meet it?

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## *Fundamentals of Citizenship Education*

CHESTER D. BABCOCK

**What fundamental objectives do we seek in the teaching of contemporary problems? This question is treated by Chester D. Babcock, Director of Curriculum, Public Schools, Seattle, Washington.**

THERE are some who question the wisdom of encouraging youth in our secondary schools to study the problems of contemporary life. Their objections take many forms. Some say that high school students are too young, too immature, to deal with such problems. Others contend that the schools had better "stick to the fundamentals." And some, unfortunately, hide behind this concern about the fundamental skills as they attempt to limit free inquiry and freedom of thought.

But what are the basic and fundamental skills that we seek to develop through the study of current problems? Analysis of courses of study for the classes in contemporary problems in our high schools would probably show that there is general agreement on the following:

- Skill in recognizing, analyzing and defining current problems.
- Skill in locating, collecting, organizing and interpreting data.
- Skill in recognizing bias and in determining the reliability and validity of data.
- Skill in arriving at conclusions on the basis of an objective study of all the facts available.

Certainly there is nothing subversive in these goals. They are truly the "fundamentals" of the educated citizen in a democracy.

For the beginnings of the teaching of contemporary problems and the placing of emphasis upon current materials in the schools we must go far back into educational history. Even in ancient Greece and Rome young citizens, in their preparation for full citizenship,

were encouraged to listen to the discussions of their elders in the marketplace and in the forums. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, men like Rousseau and Salzmann and Weise directed attention to the importance of contemporary affairs and emphasized too the importance of using current materials. Weise referred to the importance of the "zeitung" in instruction, and Salzmann bemoaned the lack of familiarity with the workings of local government on the part of students who are well acquainted with the civil institutions of antiquity. The need for coming to grips with the current problems of society was at least partially recognized.

### Courses In Current Problems Introduced

In the United States, concern about the study of contemporary problems of our society goes back to only a little before the beginning of the present century. Until that time, instruction in the social studies was largely from a mechanistic point of view. Emphasis was on the structure of government, the nature of institutions, seldom on the problems of the economic, social and political organism.

It remained for the Committee on Social Studies of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the NEA in 1916 to make a definite and constructive recommendation concerning the organization of specific courses around current problems. This national committee, working under the chairmanship of Thomas Jesse Jones of the U. S. Bureau of Education and with Arthur William Dunn, also of the Bureau, as secretary, made the recommen-

dation that a new course on economic, social and political problems be introduced at the twelfth grade level.

The introductory statement of the committee should be noted. "It is generally agreed that there should be a culminating course the last year of the high school with the purpose of giving a more definite, comprehensive and deeper knowledge of some of the vital problems of social life and thus of securing a more intelligent and active citizenship."<sup>1</sup>

Two criteria were recommended for the selection of the problems to be studied: First, are they of interest to the class? Second, are they of vital importance to society? The report of this Committee on Social Studies laid the foundation for the courses in the study of contemporary problems now found in the majority of our American high schools. It focused attention on the desirability of bringing young people into contact with the crucial problems of our society; and, further, it re-emphasized the importance of experience and practice in meeting problems, of forming judgments only on the basis of fact.

Increase in the number of courses in contemporary problems, as well as a concern about current issues in many other courses, have been continuous since 1918. A study<sup>2</sup> made in 1948 indicates that 70.7% of the secondary schools offer the course in contemporary problems in the senior year. In 53.9%

<sup>1</sup> *The Social Studies in Secondary Education*, Bulletin 1916, No. 28. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Chester D. Babcock, *The Twelfth Grade Course in Contemporary Problems in American High Schools*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1948, p. 25.

of the schools offering the course it has the status of a required subject. It was also found that in 58.8% of the schools covered in the survey, the course is offered for two semesters. That the contemporary problems course is replacing such special courses as civics, economics and sociology is indicated by 48.6% of the schools covered in the study.

#### OBJECTIVES OF COURSES ON CURRENT PROBLEMS

There appears to be rather general agreement with respect to the central goal or purpose of the problems courses. For example, the St. Paul Public Schools give as the "central objective" for the twelfth grade course: "To educate the young citizens in democratic, scientific methods of basing conclusions concerning modern problems on ascertained fact rather than on theory, tradition, hearsay, prejudice or desire."<sup>3</sup>

The Cincinnati Public Schools suggest much the same goal in the following: "The development of well-adjusted, active, informed citizenship of a democracy . . . is the specific goal of this course. Effective citizenship in our democracy requires a definite relationship and appreciation of the controversial matter of many of the most critical issues which confront us as a nation and as an integral part of the world community. In addition to developing clarity of thinking and logical reasoning with reference to current political, economic and social issues, this course fosters and encourages the truly American spirit of open-mindedness, toler-

ance and willingness to examine all phases of controversial matters with objectivity, impartiality and fairness."<sup>4</sup>

The Fresno (California) City Schools state the purpose in slightly different words: "This course presents definite knowledge essential to intelligent citizenship and to the understanding of current conditions and problems. It gives to the student an understanding of himself in his proper relationships to his social, political and economic world."<sup>5</sup>

All these statements of the general goal or objectives—and one could cite many similar examples—would seem to be in general agreement. Three specific aspects are emphasized:

First, there is a desire that young people develop the information and understanding necessary for an intelligent attack upon the problems of our democracy.

Second, the need for equipping students with the skills requisite to problem-solving is recognized.

And third, there is expressed the recognition that in addition to understanding and skill, there must be developed a genuine concern about and a desire to participate in the solution of the problems of our democracy. The emphasis in each case is placed upon social values rather than individual values. There would seem to be a recognition that, as Wesley so well pointed out, "free public schools were estab-

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<sup>4</sup> Cincinnati Public Schools, *Try-Out Course of Study, Problems of American Democracy, Grade 12*, Curriculum Bulletin 88, the foreword.

<sup>5</sup> Fresno City Schools, *Handbook and Condensed Course of Study for Secondary Grades 7-12*, Fresno, California: The Fresno Public Schools, p. 66.

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<sup>3</sup> St. Paul Public Schools, *Twelfth Grade Social Studies Curriculum Unit Outlines*, Curriculum Bulletin No. 7, St. Paul Public Schools, p. 2.

lished, not to facilitate the success of individuals as individuals, but to strengthen and promote the larger social good."<sup>6</sup>

#### SAFEGUARDS IN STUDYING CURRENT PROBLEMS

Most current problems are controversial problems. In almost all of them ideological implications may be found. Teachers too often fear that in encouraging students in their classes to study current problems and to examine all of the issues involved, they will leave themselves open to criticism in the community. But thoughtful teachers can avoid this danger by observing certain safeguards such as the following:

*Do not become too emotionally involved in issues.* Students are quick to note "feeling" on the part of the teacher with respect to any particular problem.

*Avoid loose generalizations on controversial issues.* A casual or thoughtless comment, as an issue is being discussed, can be magnified out of all proportion in the minds of children and parents.

*Be sure that material is available on all sides of a controversial issue.* This involves bringing current materials into the classroom. If the basic democratic skills are to be developed, young people must be familiar with the newspapers and the magazines, they must know the points of view and the slants of the various columnists and radio commentators. They must recognize the bias of the various organizations providing materials.

*Insist that the current materials used in the classroom show clearly their*

*sponsorship.* Dangerous material is not that which openly and frankly presents a point of view, but that which hides its origin or uses some obscure and misleading "association," "council," or "committee" name as a front.

*Illustrate by your classroom procedures that you really believe that problems can be solved on an intellectual, rational basis.* Exemplify in your own conduct our ideological belief that we can rely on intelligence in the solution of problems.

*Plan your units of work so that students will have opportunities for reflective thinking.* Encourage the setting up of real problem situations.

Such safeguards are simple and easy to follow. They are being followed by thousands of teachers who are each day leading their students into the study of current and controversial problems and who are building sounder and better citizenship in their classes without a hint of community criticism.

It may be interesting and helpful to notice the particular topics or units of work being studied in the contemporary problems classes. In a sampling of 114 secondary schools,<sup>7</sup> approximately one-fourth of the schools studied replied that no particular units of work are required in their courses. For example, the Louisville (Kentucky) Public Schools reply that "None of our units are required because we prefer to have the timeliness of the problem and the interest of the pupils determine the units chosen for study." The Denver Public Schools made a similar reply: "There is no requirement as to content; classes plan with teachers what consti-

<sup>6</sup> Edgar Wesley, *Teaching the Social Studies*, Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1942. p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Chester D. Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

tute important needs or concerns of the group."

In those schools which require specific units in the problems course, the following topics are studied:<sup>8</sup> (1) Democracy, Communism and Fascism—81.3%; (2) Family Life—72.3%; (3) International Relations—67.6%; (4) Education—64.6%; (5) Propaganda and Public Opinion—63%; (6) The Federal Government—61.5%; (7) Labor Relations—60%; (8) UNESCO and the United Nations—60%; (9) Political Parties and Issues—58.4%; (10) Inter-group Relations—56.9%; (11) Conservation of Resources—55.3%; (12) Consumer Problems—53.8%; (13) Health—53%; (14) Choosing A Vocation—52.3%. It is rather interesting that as late as September, 1948, the topic of Atomic Energy and Its Control rated far down in thirtieth place in the list of units of work required in the senior problems course.

#### TECHNIQUES IN SELECTION OF TOPICS

In schools in which none of the units is required and topics to be studied are selected because of their interest and timeliness, a number of different techniques are employed:

- Students may be asked to submit topics in which they are interested and which they believe are of common concern. The relationship which must be recognized here is that the interests and concerns of society must be considered as those of the student.
- An analysis may be made of problems being given space in the newspapers and periodicals. These reflect public concern.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

- An analysis may be made of the problems being discussed by radio commentators and analysts.

- A survey may be made of the scholarly research on problems and trends in American life. An outstanding example of this method of arriving at problems is the use made by several school systems of the research carried on by Stokes at Harvard in 1941. Stokes,<sup>9</sup> in his study, obtained opinions of thirty-nine selected scholars on those trends "likely to affect the Americanism of the adult years of the pupils now in school."

- A study may be made of the topics or problems being covered by such organizations as the Foreign Policy Association and the Public Affairs Committee. The selection of topics by organizations such as these represent jointly the judgment of scholars and the concern of the general public.

- Personal interviews with citizens of the community who are interested and participate in public affairs can supply further leads to the basic understanding which pupils need to develop.

- A community poll might be conducted after cross-section sampling has been taken. An analysis may be made to determine those problems which people feel are important.

- Outstanding social scientists may be asked to indicate those problems which in their opinions are crucial in American life. There are, of course, many other devices which might be used to determine the areas in which basic understandings should be developed.

<sup>9</sup> J. Burroughs Stokes, *The Relation of the Modern Problems Course to Recent Social Trends*. Unpublished thesis, Harvard University, 1941.

These are suggested because they are being used with success in many school systems and because they offer opportunities for young people to participate in setting up the problems to be studied.

We live in critical times. We have a heavy responsibility in preparing our young people to maintain and improve our way of life. Sound information on

problems which confront us, skill in reflective thinking, and a genuine concern that these problems can be solved are fundamentals of citizenship education. These fundamentals cannot be acquired in isolation from life. They must be developed through the study of the current problems of our communities, our nation and the world.

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## *Evaluation of Instructional Materials*

FLOYD L. HAIGHT

**Criteria for evaluation of instructional materials, as developed and adopted by the American Legion, are reported by Floyd L. Haight, Social Science Department, Dearborn High School, Dearborn, Michigan.**

MOST thoughtful American citizens have come to realize the danger in the existence in our country of an alien ideology which seeks to destroy by force, if possible, our democratic way of life. They agree that all available legal means should be used to uproot such a subversive force. Some discerning citizens have detected also other subtle influences at work. Such influences are harder to recognize, yet some are potentially extremely dangerous to our democratic way of life. Laws and statutes for control of such influences are difficult to enact and to enforce. In addition to such legislation, the everyday judgment of the everyday citizen must be enlisted to combat such infiltrating influences. But by what criteria shall our judgments be guided?

Realizing both the obvious and the hidden dangers in the existence of such an ideology, some organizations and in-

dividuals, in their enthusiasm have been somewhat indiscriminate and overzealous in their condemnation of persons, as well as of textbooks and instructional materials. These attacks have always been based upon claims of lack of patriotism, misrepresentation of facts or unfairness of content. Some of these attacks may have proved justified; yet obviously many have been unfair. Thoughtful persons have recognized that many unjust attacks have developed because some prominent individual has expressed a feeling of bias or of prejudice. Such a prejudiced or biased individual, while blandly assuming himself to be inviolate and above reproach, sometimes freely, carelessly, incorrectly and unjustly calls persons who disagree with him, "Reds" or "Communists."

Such a policy has sometimes permitted the reputations of men and women to be smeared even though

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