

# A Unified Studies Approach

*A system creates a program  
in line with its  
aspirations and needs.*

Each society develops its schools in terms of its unique traditions, aspirations and needs. While the so-called traditional high school curriculum may have been appropriate for the 300 year period of frontier development, this type of school is no longer suited to our needs.<sup>1</sup>

MEMBERS of the Board of Education of the Shawnee-Mission District Schools found themselves in complete agreement with this statement when they began to develop plans for a curriculum to be used in the junior high schools in the district.

In the fall of 1955, the Shawnee-Mission Schools began the operation of four junior high schools. Up to this time the K-8-4 educational plan was used in Northeast Johnson County, Kansas. Pupils of elementary age attended schools throughout the two townships of Mission and Shawnee, all administered as separate districts. For many years pupils graduating from the eighth grade attended Shawnee-Mission Rural High School for the four years of senior high school.

<sup>1</sup> Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Preparation of Core Teachers for Secondary Schools*. Washington, D. C.; the Association, a department of the National Education Association, 1955. p. 5.

Curriculum plans were initiated by Howard McEachen, Superintendent of Schools. He sent a detailed questionnaire listing 244 items to 187 schools in 48 states. School characteristics and policies, curriculum practices and evaluation methods were examined. Approximately two thirds of the schools studied used a block of time within which units of work cut across subject matter lines in grade seven. More than 30 percent of the seventh grades organized on a departmental basis planned to adopt the block of time class. While a block of time was being used in many schools in grade eight the number was not as great; 41 percent, and in grade nine only 22 percent of the schools were following this practice.

Prior to the survey, teachers had been working at Shawnee-Mission High School and at the University of Kansas in study groups and workshops, formulating plans for the curriculum of the junior high schools. The Board of Education studied the recommendations of the study groups, the research of the workshops,

---

**Ralph E. Chalender is Principal, Milburn Junior High School, Shawnee-Mission High School District, Shawnee-Mission, Kansas.**

the results of the survey, and decided to require Unified Studies for all grades in the junior high school.

### A Required Course

Unified Studies is a required course for all junior high school pupils in the Shawnee-Mission District Schools. This course requires a relatively large block of time. In grades seven and eight, a three hour time block is provided and in grade nine a two-hour block is used. Subject areas in grades seven and eight include social studies, language arts and science. In grade nine social studies and language are included in the two-hour block of time. The Unified Studies program for the Shawnee-Mission District Schools was designed for the purpose of promoting and developing a democratic way of life. Some of the main objectives set up by the planners of this program include: to provide opportunity for the learner to have experience which will help him become sensitive to problems of common welfare in the family, the school, the community, and the nation; to teach him to work with others in the solution of these problems; to develop his feeling of individual responsibility for common welfare; to help him act in harmony with what he says and believes; to improve his individual skills; and to broaden his understanding of the physical and social world.

After it was decided to have block-time classes in the junior high schools, the Board of Education of the Shawnee-Mission schools instructed the superintendent to direct work on a definite outline of subject content which would be used and included in resource units. It was planned that the resource units would be used by the teachers as guides in their teaching of Unified Studies.

Resource units which were to be used in the Shawnee-Mission Junior High Schools were prepared by groups of teachers from the elementary schools of the area and some of the staff of the senior high school. They were prepared during several years beginning in 1952 and ending in 1955. There have been some changes in the original units; however, many of the units are being used as they were written by the study groups. The revision of units has been done by groups of teachers in much the same manner as the original units were written. The following units are now required for the seventh grade:

We Are the Junior High School  
Let's Improve Our Communication with Others

How Do We Find Our Way about the World?

We Live in Many Communities  
Living in Harmony with Myself and Others

What Is Science?  
How Do Plants and Animals Grow?

Required units for grade eight include the following:

Looking Ahead  
Let's Improve Our Communication with Others

How Did the United States Become a Nation?

Westward Expansion and the Civil War  
How Do We Govern Ourselves in a Democracy?

How Did the United States Become the Greatest Producer of Goods in the World?

How Can We Conserve Natural Resources?

Required units for grade nine include the following:

Looking Ahead  
Let's Improve Our Communication with Others  
Careers  
Interdependence in a Shrinking World

## The United Nations

One or more of the following areas: Russia, South America, Africa, Western Europe, India, China.

## Evaluation

The Unified Studies program at Shawnee-Mission is now in its sixth year of operation. During this period the program has been under constant evaluation by pupils, parents, teachers, and administrators. Several doctoral candidates from the University of Kansas have conducted studies of the Unified Studies program.

During the school year of 1959-60 the author made a thorough study of the subject content and the teaching procedures used in the Unified Studies classes in the Shawnee-Mission Junior High Schools.

Unified Studies teachers are constantly reminded of the need for evaluation. The Unified Studies program offers many ways of checking the progress of pupils in regard to interests, attitudes and growth. Evaluation is a continuous process, not merely a terminal activity. Opportunities present themselves daily to evaluate the success of the selection of content and the use of resources and materials. Was the unit worth the time spent? What did the pupils gain from it? Have the pupils increased their ability to listen carefully and critically? Did the pupils work effectively as individuals and in groups? How could the unit be improved? Should it be required or optional another year?

Such questions are a sampling of the many that are used on a check list to evaluate the success of the teaching-learning unit. Evaluation should be a daily habit. By using a large block of time, the teacher has many opportunities to help pupils evaluate their progress

individually. Self-evaluation is an important aspect of the Unified Studies program and should be used continuously.

In evaluating the teaching-learning unit, the Unified Studies teacher is encouraged to use the following categories set up by the members of the research group who conducted the Eight-Year Study. In using this check list it is suggested that the teacher ask, "Did this unit in some way contribute to the following items?"

The development of effective methods of thinking

The cultivation of effective work habits and study skills

The inculcation of social attitudes

The acquisition of a wide range of significant interests

The development of increased appreciation of music, art, literature, and other aesthetic experiences

The development of social sensitivity

The development of better personal-social adjustment

The acquisition of important information

The development of physical health

The development of a consistent philosophy of life.

Fifty-one teachers who had taught one or more years in the system were interviewed to secure information regarding the teaching of Unified Studies. The interviews were based upon structured questions which were designed to secure information about subject content and the types of procedures used in teaching the various phases of the course. Each interview was tape recorded.

In general, all teachers used some form of committee work during the year. Teachers usually select committees according to the pupil's interests. The methods used in getting all pupils to work in committees differed. The most essential factor reported was the impor-

tance of knowing something about each individual's needs, interests, personality, and ability to get along with others.

All classes have a weekly library period. Ninety-three percent of the teachers found the librarian to be of help in locating materials and assisting in finding resource materials.

The experiences which pupils have working together were found to be most helpful in the development of oral communication skills.

All teachers interviewed reported that they found many opportunities in all the units of work to encourage creative writing.

In general teachers reported that they did not find it difficult to teach the mechanics of expression in relation to the regular unit of work. Several of the teachers have digressed from the Unified Studies approach and are teaching grammar as a separate subject. There is much uniformity in the methods used in teaching the parts of speech, capitalization, punctuation and spelling.

Teachers reported that a wide and commendable selection of books and equipment is provided for the teaching of geographical concepts.

Social skills, attitudes, interests, work study habits, appreciations and self-evaluation techniques are some of the important areas mentioned as being a part of the guidance provided for pupils in the Unified Studies classes.

Many of the teachers reported that teaching Unified Studies was more difficult than teaching in the traditional method but that it was more challenging and rewarding. The most frequently mentioned values of Unified Studies included the integration and correlation of materials; development of better work study skills; the development and furthering of democratic procedures; the

development of more acceptable social habits; the opportunity for group and individual guidance; the furthering of individual interests through the wide variety of subject matter and the opportunity to develop critical thinking.

Since the first year of Unified Studies in the schools there has been a general improvement in the teaching procedures.

According to all studies which have been made, a large percentage of the teachers at Shawnee-Mission like the Unified Studies program and consider it to have at least four distinct advantages. These advantages given in order of the frequency of mention by teachers are as follows:

1. Unified Studies activities are more likely than a separate-subject approach to teach social values and meanings.
2. The Unified program provides more opportunities for learning through personal experience and through the use of a wide variety of materials.
3. The opportunity to work with a variety of materials in a unit of work makes learning more concrete.
4. The Unified program makes available a larger block of time for carrying out projects involving excursions and other realistic learning activities.

In summary, this has been the story of the planning, development and evaluation of one phase of a junior high school curriculum. There are many ways to evaluate a curriculum. One way to evaluate some facets of a curriculum is through what teachers say they do. This method has been used with apparent success at Shawnee-Mission. The teachers and school administrators are pleased with the results of the evaluations of Unified Studies. Apparently the parents and other citizens, too, are satisfied with the findings.

Copyright © 1960 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.