

The teacher's key role in working

Toward Continuity in the Social Studies

GET a group of social studies teachers together to organize a curriculum and you will likely find at the outset that there are as many philosophies and plans as there are teachers. Each one would build the entire curriculum with a focus around his grade level. Each one might feel that he has the responsibility for teaching about the United Nations, international understanding, democracy, good citizenship, contemporary affairs, and the many other kinds of emphases related to his field—these things, in addition to a certain body of course content.

One may ask, "Can teachers really do all these things?" The answers are both "yes" and "no." Certainly "yes," if teachers are willing to share their responsibilities and if they are able to work together effectively to fulfill them. Certainly "no," if there is no cooperative planning.

The responsibilities of the teacher will be more nearly achieved if there is continuity in the social studies program than if there is not. A fundamental premise for considering continuity is that *the final consideration is more what it means to*

the pupil than to the curriculum builder. The pupil is the immediate and the ultimate beneficiary of learning experiences that continuity affords. Continuity may, in a superficial sense, mean a logical sequence of studies of family, school, neighborhood, and community, or of well organized compartments of history, geography, and civics. However, whether the outcomes of content organization only per se lead to continuity is open to question.

The actual manifestation of continuity is realized in the development and behavior of the pupil. The end of our endeavors, then, is not just to create a curriculum structure or sequence of learnings that looks good but rather to strive for the ultimate influences that become an inner part of the pupils.

Certainly continuity is a matter of concern as the pupil moves from teacher to teacher, grade to grade, school to school, or town to town. All of these movements raise problems of continuity which are undoubtedly more critical for the pupil than for the teacher.

Also, the content of the social studies does not lend itself automatically to a logical order or sequence. Many topics can be taught in the elementary as well

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as in the secondary school. Thus their treatment varies according to factors which have nothing to do with structural organization. These will be presently considered.

How, then, can we go about the job of promoting continuity so that the pupil is the ultimate beneficiary? The job can be divided into two basic processes: (a) the building of the over-all curriculum; and (b) the program of classroom instructional improvement.

Suppose we take a look at some of the significant "musts" which should foster continuity within these categories.

Building of the Curriculum

1. A fundamental premise is that curriculum guides must be developed and used by teachers. Regardless of the efforts of principals, consultants, and other resource persons, the basic production job must be done by teachers. The actual curriculum is that which is taught in the classroom and what the teacher makes it to be. If teachers produce the curriculum guide and create the framework for the curriculum, they are more likely to use it. It is when a framework is agreed upon and followed by teachers that continuity can be enhanced.

2. A curriculum building process must involve an in-service, educative process for all participants. Without a learning process taking place for those involved, the resultant curriculum will only be a rehashing of what has been going on anyway.

3. Teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 12 must be involved. They must share in working together toward common objectives. Each must be mindful of what is to come in higher grades or what has happened in lower grades.

4. The objectives of the social studies should be framed so that they furnish a common bond for all teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 12.⁴ These objectives should be formulated in clear language. They should have realistic and intelligent meaning for teachers at every grade level.

5. The curriculum planners must know "their subject," but they should also know their pupils. They should avail themselves of the information that is known about the growth characteristics of pupils at different age levels. Selection should be made of those characteristics which are most pertinent to the social studies teacher. Consideration should be given to the implications of these characteristics both for the curriculum and for the teaching process. It is only by arriving at generalizations concerning these implications that we can settle many problems that arise. For example, it is by understanding pupils well that we can approach skills development or apply the cycle theory and expanding community philosophy more intelligently.

6. We can also carry on a more effective job of curriculum building and of teaching when we pay heed to the contributions from the psychology of learning. If the most effective climate of learning were found in classrooms all the way up to Grade 12, there would be many common elements of continuity.

7. Beneath the surface of the structure or organization of content are the experiences in the development of skills which become a part of the pupil long after he has forgotten many specific and isolated facts. The favorable curriculum program is one which keeps building for these acquisitions and maintaining them constantly regardless of the subject matter at hand. For these skills

we take the pupil from where he is and work with him to help him grow.

We cannot organize a curriculum for skills development specifically grade by grade because there is a range of pupil abilities in any individual grade. We can, however, plan a general program in which we identify and generally organize an over-all structure of skills and we can create a philosophy and climate for teaching them. We are concerned not only with the skills of the immediate classroom learnings but with the broader ones of intelligent citizenship and of adjustments to a complex and changing society.

8. Another avenue for fostering continuity besides skills development is in the identification and organization of basic generalizations or concepts that recur from elementary to secondary grades. These form longitudinal currents which can become basic guidelines for the selection of important content.

Recently the National Council for the Social Studies organized a scope based on the "central principles and values of a free society."¹ The principles are stated as "14 themes, each a societal goal of American democracy." For each theme several concepts and generalizations are listed. From these, a curriculum can be fashioned for each grade level.

A comprehensive state-wide study in California² has included, as one of its prime phases, the identification of basic generalizations in each of the social sciences. The generalizations are "large, central ideas" for the selection of content which offer "direction to instruction . . .

¹ *A Guide to Content in the Social Studies*. Report of the NCSS Committee on Concepts and Values. Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, p. 3.

² *Report of the State Central Committee on Social Studies*. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1959. p. 26.

but are not intended to be taught per se."

Educators in Maryland have established seven major persistent problems as areas of democratic living as a common ground for continuity. In South Carolina six areas of living have been outlined.

Coupled with this unifying type of approach are the efforts for strengthening the teaching in all grade levels of such emphases as economic education, human relations, citizenship education, international understanding, and conservation education.

These are all noteworthy attempts to establish better continuity for the curriculum.

9. Continuity is promoted when the learnings within the social studies are related to each other. Certainly geography is important to relate to history, and economics is important to geography. There are mutual and overlapping skills and understandings from subject to subject. This holds true whether the structural organization of the social studies is subject-centered or fused or whether the social studies are combined with other subjects such as English in a core program. Even if there is not a core program, there are opportunities for correlation between the social studies and other subject matter fields.

10. A significant step which would combine several of the practices already pointed out was undertaken by the National Council for the Social Studies when it accepted a report³ in 1958 authorizing a national commission to "re-examine and clarify the role of the social sciences in the school curriculum and to

³ "Curriculum Planning in American Schools: the Social Studies." A draft report from the Commission on the Social Studies of the National Council for the Social Studies, 1958.

develop a structural framework appropriate to a dynamic society." Such a study could have tremendous value and influence for curriculum making at the local level. "After three decades of reliance on local curriculum planning," in which there have been strengths and weaknesses, the time seems ripe for national committees of both social scientists and educators to develop basic resource materials and guidelines which local curriculum builders can use.

Program of Classroom Instructional Improvement

Continuity is not established just because we build a curriculum. In fact the job has only then been begun. Since what goes on in the classroom determines the curriculum in the last analysis, the competencies of teachers in carrying it out effectively are of paramount consideration. These competencies are numerous, but some of the more significant practices which affect continuity are considered in this section.

1. The teacher-pupil planning situation gives the pupil a chance to draw upon previous elements in his experience as well as to continue to develop his potentialities and interests. Such joint planning also gives the teacher a chance to involve his needs. It provides a built-in self-motivating device that the teacher-dominated classroom lacks. It makes pupils active participants. They are not just taught; they learn.

2. Teaching in terms of units or wholes or large blocks of content and activities replaces day to day fragmentary teaching. It enables pupils and teachers to concentrate on major goals.

3. A wide variety of resources is essential. When it comes to reading materials,

this helps provide for various levels of reading ability and for the varied interests of pupils. Thus there is more adaptation to the individual pupil than there is with the use of just one textbook.

4. A variety of experiences is also essential. If a similar lesson plan for all pupils is followed every day, the pupils must accommodate themselves to stereotyped learning plans. If there are variety and adjustments for varying ability levels, we are helping to foster continuity for individuals. During supervised study or during the developmental stages of group activities, time is created for the teacher also to counsel with individuals and groups.

5. Trying to "cover" too much ground and getting buried in a mass of detail does not help continuity. Concentrating on significant wholes, topics, problems, trends and issues in depth, however, does help. When problems are used, they should be both real and meaningful to the pupil.

6. There must be a constant effort to relate past learnings to present ones. Opportunities for review and preview should also be utilized. At the beginning of the school year, there might well be a review of what has been learned to date and what will be studied this year. At the close of a year, summarization, generalization, and evaluation are also important. The processes of preview and review are also important at the beginning and end of units of study, or even for the daily class period.

In conclusion, the ultimate beneficiary of the efforts to promote continuity is the pupil. He flourishes through a curriculum and an instructional program that provide the climate for him to be an active learner and to grow intellectually, socially and emotionally from year to year.

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