

A New Direction

for the social studies curriculum.

THE development of curriculum in many fields of study at the public school level has been dynamic and explosive during the past decade. Paced by scientific advances and the expansion of the knowledge frontier, the schools have reacted in many ways. Initial work in science has produced a series of new materials and an articulated framework from early elementary through secondary classwork. The entire curricular pattern for instruction in science has been altered and is continuing to be modified. The same is true of mathematics. Although differences of opinion on materials and approach have occurred in the "new mathematics," the old mathematics is out and another entire curricular design has undergone change which affects the K-12 program.

Science and mathematics are the two most obvious areas of curricular change, but other fields have made major moves to alter the system on an articulated basis. Foreign languages moved from a determinedly written approach to audio-lingual beginnings and instituted the elementary school foreign language study

as a prelude to secondary school work. English has been under some recent change as a result of concern that traditional grammar was an inadequate means for understanding the language. New materials are available and more are being produced which lean heavily on a linguistics framework for the study of English.

Of the major academic fields in the schools only social studies has not undergone basic modification. Recent advocates of modification in the social studies curriculum have appeared to write and argue, but no consistent pattern has yet been devised or implemented which has won widespread approval. Project Social Studies, under sponsorship of the United States Office of Education, begun in 1963, may shed some light on social studies curricular change. Presently, however, it is very difficult to perceive the appropriate direction for the social studies. Much of the push for change rests on statements like those in the first two paragraphs of this paper. "Other subjects have changed with the times, why not social studies?" This, of course, is not the most rational purpose in change, yet it is a real concern of many who see large quantities of literature, support money, and student interest at-

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tracted to those fields which have been changing rapidly. Others pushing for change in the social studies are vocal reminders of the vested interest groups which both promote and impede alterations: the one extreme calling for retrenchment and reinforcement of already existing structures or revision of the social studies subjects of a previous period; the other extreme proposing a complete metamorphosis in light of the social influences of behavioral science.

The Most, the Least Changing

It may be that the reason for lack of radical change in the social studies is the result of several factors. The field is, at once, the most and the least changing of studies. It is the most changing in its continual interest in current events and contemporary affairs. This evolutionary attitude toward the study of society places the field in a position of reaction to each day's news and, thus, keeps it changing. It is the least changing in that, as studies of society, it is the victim of cultural lag since society creates the lag. Additionally, discoveries in the social studies are not as revolutionary or as popular as discoveries in the scientific areas, and are more subject to open question and argument than more technically oriented subjects. In any event the field of social studies has not become noted recently for significant alterations.

One interesting aspect of the lack of change is the contradictory nature of the field and its apparent effect on the curricular structure of the social studies in today's schools. The contradictions in the social studies are the subject of current discussion, and attempts to provide consistency in the disciplines supporting the social studies are under way. Inconsistencies within the field have been

problems for the social studies in public schools as a result of compounding.

College students are confronted with varying interpretations of historic incident, contradicting theories of economics, opposing thoughts on political structure, conflicting positions on the nature of man and society, and other polarities in the disciplines of history, political science, economics, geography, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. For some reason we assume that only college age students are capable of comprehending the contradictions; in fact, proficient professors strive to confront their students with opposing views to demonstrate the nature of the field. Yet, the teachers and textual materials offered to elementary and secondary students normally assume "answer-giving" roles which presume no contradictions and no controversy. This happening, in itself, is a contradiction. The inconsistencies of man should be discussed and analyzed in the classroom to assist students in understanding man and society. The inconsistencies should not be the curricular obstacle which prevents the student from understanding.

We have failed to separate the positive value of contradiction to demonstrate the nature of the material from the negative value of inconsistency and indirection in curriculum building. In the first area we provide little opportunity for the students to grapple with opposing views. This is accomplished by careful screening of content to control controversy and by a lack of funds to provide more than a single text and teacher as sources of information. In the second area we superimpose a highly illogical pattern of social studies courses upon the school and require each student to partake of the bits and pieces, hoping he will retain American History, for ex-

ample, from fifth grade to eighth grade to eleventh grade despite our contrary actions to squeeze a lot of other social studies subjects into sixth, seventh, ninth, tenth, and twelfth grades.

What We Say, What We Do

There are many other examples of inconsistency and indirection in the social studies curriculum which appear as contradictions of a negative sort.

1. We propose an articulated curriculum from kindergarten through high school yet have never adopted one. Teachers of the various grade levels know little of what is taught before and what will come after their grade. Students, of course, have great difficulty in synthesizing when the particles seem to bear little relationship to each other.

2. We support a goal to produce enlightened, inquiring citizens of a free society yet continue to seclude fields of inquiry from student investigation. Such areas as religion, sex, morality, conflicting ideologies, and economics get limited and restricted study in the public schools.

3. We promote the development of skills in critical thinking yet require students to memorize quantities of material without analysis. Students are provided with authoritarian teachers and authoritarian texts and are expected to analyze critically the content of the field.

4. We discuss at length the interrelatedness of knowledge yet continue to place students in a program of segmented, unrelated courses without opportunity to perceive the common threads.

5. We institute courses and assign teachers in areas where the teacher has limited preparation or little opportunity to gain formal training. Hiring history majors to teach geography or sociology

classes or the reverse is a common practice. A similar happening occurs in required state history classes where there may be only one local college offering one or two courses in the subject. A teacher assigned to teach such a class in a high school finds great problems in acquiring collegiate preparation.

6. Social scientists, in general, subscribe to the concept that man is rational, yet we construct curricular designs which are irrational and act as obstacles to education. The patterns lack consistency, demonstrate the influence of vested interest groups, require all students to jump the same hurdles, and produce the idea that man exists in a static, sterile world which is subject to dissection without design.

A New Curricular Pattern

There is a need for a social studies curricular pattern which attempts to overcome the more obvious conflicts. The direction of the pattern could still be retained at local, regional or state level as now, but the pattern should meet the following criteria.

Rationality—The pattern should be consistent in structure and have continuity. A K-12 pattern of rationality is preferred.

New Knowledge—The infusion of new knowledge from the social sciences and related fields should be provided for by the pattern.

Freedom of Inquiry—Consistent with the age, ability and maturity level of the students, the pattern, teachers and materials should allow increasing freedom to inquire into all aspects of the social studies.

Integration of Knowledge—The pattern
(Continued on page 341)

ing it. And his position tends to be one that gives him a better than average chance to see education in the large, to study it, and at the same time be engaged in action.

One could read this in self-congratulation, to say, "What a wonderful organization ASCD is!" We had better read it in the sobering thought, "What an awful responsibility ASCD bears!" We do not need to think ourselves alone. We do not even need to think invidiously of other organizations which serve their own groups and purposes well. And yet the fact remains: No other organization has put together quite the same combination of people, to push the frontiers of educational thought and knowledge and apply what is learned unflinchingly to the whole of education. No other large organization has developed quite the same tradition of using all its membership and staff resources democratically to work its way through the toughest problems without giving an inch because of timidity.

And if this be so, what do we do now to use the brain and muscle we have grown? Within our own ranks we are an exceptionally congenial group, good at even painfully honest intercommunication. Can we consciously build on this resource to get ourselves more adequate preparation for a role so demanding that it is terrifying? (As I wrote this I questioned increasingly whether I met the qualifications; I wonder whether you haven't had the same reaction.) Can we consciously facilitate the mutual interpenetration of inquiry and practice, of specialization and wholeness?

Beyond our ranks, how can we best give our nation the help it needs in these days of high demand and short supply? Can we, and should we, deliberately build up the image of the educationist who is more than practitioner, more than

abstract scholar, a person with a unique contribution? Can we bring him to be sought for by the public and by officials, so that he will be used where he is most needed? And can we make the unique role so attractive to the profession that more and more of the best young educators will also aspire to meet the tests of the educationist?

New Direction—Nelson

(Continued from page 295)

should provide opportunity to demonstrate the interrelationships among disciplines. The social studies pattern should blend with the total school curriculum.

Utilization of Talents—The teachers' areas of competence should be taken into account as the curriculum is planned and should be coordinated through employment practices of the district. Teachers should be involved in the planning, executing and evaluating of the curriculum.

Skills Development—The pattern should promote the development of social studies skills on increasing levels of abstraction as student maturity increases. Skills in social scientific reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, and listening should be specifically noted in the pattern.

The foregoing criteria for a social studies curricular design do not deal with the subject content or the specific purposes of social studies education. They are offered as a basis for direction in planning a curriculum to overcome some of the defects noted earlier in this paper.

Other subjects in the schools have experienced dramatic and extensive change, some of which is still under scrutiny by scholars in the subject and by educators utilizing the materials, but much of

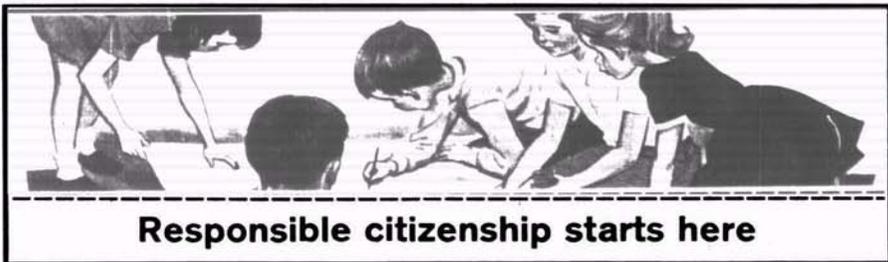
which is obvious improvement. It is safe to say that all change is not progress, but there is little progress without change.

Both radical reformism and long considered judgment are important factors in the social studies. In those social areas in which the answers are not clearly evident and in which empirical data are used to support both sides of an issue, there is a strong tendency toward tug-of-war inconsistency. The schools have felt the brunt of this inconsistency in the social studies curriculum. A pattern which has one basis in the primary grades, changes in the intermediate grades, drifts again in the junior high school, and saunters through the high school without apparent direction produces students who complete the program without knowing what social studies are, and caring even less. Can the social studies afford to continue moving in all directions? There should not be an

inflexible master design encompassing a supreme rationality. Indeed, this would demand the absolute truths which we clearly do not have. We do need, however, a pattern which has a consistent direction evolving as the student matures.

Early Childhood Education—Weaver (Continued from page 299)

from geography, economics, political science and history as well as the more traditional sociology and anthropology; (c) application of Jerome Bruner's "spiral" approach to teaching basic concepts and principles. Also there is a growing consensus that important learnings cannot be left to chance, or to "incidental" teaching. Opportunities must be planned to insure that in the primary grades children begin to build the foundation for the basic understandings so necessary for effective citizenship.



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