

Social Science Education: A Curriculum Frontier

INTEREST in the revision and improvement of social studies curricula by curriculum specialists, teachers and social scientists is clearly increasing. While mathematics and the physical and biological sciences have made great strides in bringing their curricula abreast of current knowledge, there has been no similar discipline-based movement in social studies. This is true, even though social science research and theory have progressed extensively in the past quarter century. Four limitations of current social studies education are briefly summarized here.

Some Limitations of Social Science Curricula

1. Social studies have been viewed primarily as a body of information to be mastered. Learning has focused on memorizing facts rather than the development of critical and analytical thinking.

2. There has been little distinction between value clarification or value inquiry and value indoctrination. It is important to teach children the distinction, on the one hand, between objective data collection, analysis and interpretation of phenomena and, on the other hand, the mak-

ing of reflective value judgments about those phenomena.

3. We have tended to make false assumptions about the learning potential of children and have expected too little from them. As the new math and physical science curricula have shown, children can understand and use concepts that traditionally have been reserved for high school or even college students. We have also assumed an obligation to protect children from the "harsh realities" of life. While we may view poverty, unemployment, discrimination, crime and war as "harsh" realities, nevertheless, they are part of children's lives—whether by exposure to mass media or through the range of their own experiences.

4. The social studies curricula do not adequately represent the disciplines that

Patricia Schmuck is a former elementary school teacher and currently Project Coordinator; John E. Lohman is Research Assistant and a doctoral candidate in Social Psychology; Ronald Lippitt is Professor of Psychology and of Sociology and Program Director; Robert Fox is Professor of Education, Director of University School and Research Associate; all of the Center for Research on Utilization of Scientific Knowledge, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

deal with man and his social world, Psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics have been ignored to a large degree, while history and geography and some aspects of political science dominate.

Need for Social Science Education

It seems important to us to introduce a broadly gauged program of social science education at all age levels. This should be done because the social sciences represent bodies of knowledge that are a significant part of the contemporary stockpile of science-based information. Social scientists are playing an increasingly important role in social policy, social legislation, and many other aspects of social engineering. We have an obligation to expose children to this body of knowledge and practice and to allow them to develop images of social scientists and their work just as they develop images of physical and biological scientists.

What is more important, children continuously do learn about human behavior. They are required to interact within the context of their family, their classroom, their peer group, their churches and their clubs. They do make generalizations about human behavior and take value positions. We must, however, question the accuracy as well as the adequacy of these unguided incidental learnings.

The classroom can and should be a laboratory for guided learning about human behavior. It is here that children can question their assumptions and have an opportunity to delve into realms of knowledge that have pertinence for their lives. A good social science curriculum should provide an exciting experience with the use of scientific methods to

study human behavior and the social environment. Children need, and often are eager for, knowledge about motivation, learning, individual differences, human development, irrationality, and intergroup processes in order to help them function in their present day world, as well as to prepare them to solve some of the critical social problems of the world.

An Illustration of Social Science Education

Our Michigan Elementary Social Science Education Project¹ is developing a social science curriculum for upper elementary grades. This curriculum spans the fields of psychology, social psychology, micro-sociology and the small group aspects of social anthropology. Paralleling recent revisions in the physical sciences, this curriculum employs a laboratory approach to the scientific study of human behavior. Each unit uses the classroom as a laboratory where "specimens" of behavioral interaction are explored.

A number of inquiry projects, designed to enable the child to develop an understanding of social science content, to master the rudiments of social scientific methods, and to employ the scientific values of openness to inquiry, objectivity, curiosity, reliability, and validity are included in each unit. In addition to the discovery process of the laboratory, the units include rewrites of studies made by social scientists.

¹ The University of Michigan Social Science Education Project is affiliated with the Social Science Education Consortium of Midwest Universities and Colleges. This is a cooperative enterprise of 25 or 30 social scientists and educators engaged in social science curriculum projects. The Director of SSEC is Irving Morrisett, located at the Consortium central office, Purdue University, 404 Hayes Street, Lafayette, Indiana.

An introductory unit presents the domain of social science to the students and includes a series of activities focused on developing methodological skills such as observation, interviewing, and coding. The other six units are designed to encompass some aspect of behavior.

Criteria for Content

Two criteria have been developed for determining the content of these six units:

1. The particular area of inquiry must have been the subject of a considerable amount of scientific investigation which has produced a coherent body of data and theory.

2. The area of inquiry must have relevance and meaning in the life of the child.

The six units selected are: Friendliness—Unfriendliness; People and Groups Different From Ourselves; Getting Work Done Alone and in Groups; Social Influence; Decision Making; and Personal and Group Development.

The package of materials in each unit consists of a teaching guide, phonograph records of behavioral incidents, a children's workbook and a booklet of scientific studies and experiments rewritten for children. Each unit has been structured flexibly so that the teacher may adapt it to his pupils' past experience and readiness, methodological skills, conceptual knowledge and previous exposure to social science. The units are being developed for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade children. Instead of designing different topics for study at these different grade levels, we believe the child can study the same phenomena with increasing complexity and methodological sophistication. Each unit involves the following sequence of study phases:

Preparatory phases undertaken by the teacher prior to teaching in his classroom.

1. Teacher preparation—teacher reads prepared conceptual materials in teachers' guide; reviews skills needed for the unit; plans opportunities for direct study of behavior such as arranging for behavioral specimens in the classroom, or gaining permission to use another classroom for interviewing.

2. Classroom diagnosis—teacher uses a prepared questionnaire to diagnose the level of class information, attitudes and skills in order to adapt the materials to his classroom.

Inquiry phases undertaken by pupils to study the behavioral phenomena of a unit.

3. Question asking and inquiry design—pupils are involved in the process of asking curiosity questions about the phenomena under study and developing a study design to obtain data to answer some of these questions: what populations to study? what kinds of sampling? what kinds of methods for data collection are appropriate?

4. Data collection—pupils develop their own instruments or use those provided to collect data—questionnaires, interview schedules, observation procedures for direct study of the phenomena; finding out what scientists and other "experts" have discovered.

5. Data analysis—children learn how to organize and analyze (coding, frequency distributions, simple relationships) the data collected in order to answer inquiry questions.

6. Answering questions—pupils learn how to interpret the data they have collected and analysed and attempt to make tentative answers to their inquiry questions.

7. Value inquiry—a clear distinction is

made between objective interpretations and predictions based upon data yielded by scientific study and the evaluation of these findings in terms of individual personal and social values. These are seen as complementary aspects of the inquiry process. The child identifies the value preferences he maintains about social interaction and examines their bases.

8. Generalization—children develop implications of findings for other situations, for other people, at other times.

9. Evaluation—children evaluate the appropriateness of the methods they used to answer questions (involvement in issues of reliability, validity, size and representativeness of sample, etc.) and prepare new inquiry questions which the study has raised which might be answered for fuller understanding.

Phases three through nine may be repeated several times. In any one unit there may be 15-20 possible inquiry projects from which teachers and pupils will select those of greatest interest and relevance for study.

Summary and Evaluation Phases to bring together the learnings from the inquiry projects and to evaluate the unit.

10. Integration of findings—class integrates and summarizes the findings from its inquiry efforts; considers what the methods used in different studies contribute to understanding the phenomena under study.

11. Value inquiry—elaboration of phase 7 in context of the integrated findings from the total unit.

12. Generalization—children review learnings and make generalizations.

13. Replication, application (optional)—students apply the findings to their own lives and/or continue to replicate studies on their own.

14. Evaluations—both teacher and students evaluate the effectiveness of the

unit; teacher evaluates the changes in information, attitudes and skills.

Each unit is focused upon the individual (psychological), the interpersonal (social psychological), and the group processes (sociological). Within each of these areas, conceptual understanding of the relationships among the internal elements (cognitions, attitudes and values, intentions and goals) is stressed. The behavioral phenomena under study are developed in the context of like-age and cross-age peer relations, and cross-generational and cross-cultural interaction.

Teacher Education

This new type of curriculum is a challenge to educators who must prepare future teachers and to curriculum planners who must prepare teachers already in the field to do an effective job of social science education. Ultimately, the strength of any curriculum does not reside with the curriculum planners. It resides with teachers in the classroom engaged in the task of teaching. A well-developed curriculum may be a necessary prerequisite for effective teaching, but it is not a sufficient condition. The success of any curriculum depends upon the knowledge and competence of the curriculum utilizer, the teacher. Consequently, curriculum planners cannot avoid or neglect the job of teacher involvement and education.

During the initial pilot testing of the social science materials, our project staff attempted to isolate the necessary components of teacher preparation for social science education. Collaborating teachers were engaged in a training program while teaching the curriculum materials in their classrooms. The task of the training sessions became threefold:

1. We found that teachers had varying degrees of knowledge and attitudes about social science. It was necessary to give basic scientific education about the content and methods to be taught.

2. Our materials introduced some new teaching techniques that required training and practice. We developed skill training exercises for teachers.

3. Teachers needed some "at the elbow" or reference help for problems that arose in the course of teaching. Consultants were made available.

In any wide distribution of curriculum materials, it is, of course, not feasible to depend on continuing personal consultation for teachers. In order to meet teacher-needs the project staff is developing a self-administering package of materials which may be used individually or by a group of teachers. We have identified six areas of activity that require understanding and skill for teaching these units. Each area is represented by conceptual and skill material which includes phonograph records, workbooks containing programed materials, teaching exercises and reference materials.

Curriculum Development and Applied Social Science

The needs for continued teacher education are probably more crucial in our present day than ever before. We have outlined one approach—training courses built into curriculum materials. Another approach might be through a new version of a university correspondence course in social science. A teacher could be involved in the university correspondence course for credit while teaching the materials in his class. Expansion of well designed in-service education programs sponsored by school systems is another approach.

To foster the development, diffusion and adaptation of the social science curriculum is in itself a scientific challenge. We must use our scientific resources to inquire into such questions as the following:

1. How can the concepts and methods of the disciplines best be related to the levels of development of children's concepts, interests, attitudes, and range of experience?

2. How can teachers be prepared to seek, rather than resist, the challenge of re-learning and continuing new learning of social science knowledge?

3. How can data on the learning experiences of the pupils be fed into the curriculum revision process?

4. What kind of orientation do parents need in order to understand, support and contribute to the development of social science education?

5. What teaching techniques will be most effective in achieving the goals of social science education?

We have identified variations on two current patterns of curriculum development and spread. In one pattern the social studies curriculum specialist (in a College of Education or a large school system) conducts a curriculum revision or development project, utilizing a co-operating school system or set of teachers for feasibility testing, and consulting knowledge specialists for validity checking.

Diffusion and adoption depend on the usual channels of commercial publication, professional journals, and local teacher committees. In a second pattern, the content specialists, the scientists, "call the shots" in the development project. Classroom teachers are recruited to try out the materials, while direct in-service education is conducted by the scientists, primarily in summer institutes.

Both patterns are weak when viewed in terms of a scientific theory of the process of change. Both patterns ignore the relevant research on change which has been conducted on the adaptation of new technical practices in industry and agriculture. Both patterns also ignore the ways in which the adoption of new teaching practices is a different process from the adoption of new technical practices.

Emerging Trends

From an analysis of our experience to date, several generalizations are emerging for us:

1. Senior scientists and educators *must* be committed to joint learning from each other through joint production efforts.

2. Young scientists in training must be attracted to participate in some of the needed tasks of curriculum development, such as knowledge retrieval, classroom observation, and development of evaluation tools.

3. Selected teachers must be an important part of curriculum development teams, and need to be representative of contrasting teaching situations, such as social class, ethnic differences and urban-rural settings.

4. School administrators and curriculum coordinators need to be consultants on issues of teacher training, curriculum adoption and parent relations.

5. Procedures should be developed which allow students to be active participants in curriculum design.

6. Because the changes in value, attitude, and skill required in social science education represent a deeper process of change than is typically required in new technical practices, there must be continued experimentation with the design-

ing and redesigning of procedures and materials for teacher education.

7. The plans for diffusion of new curriculum models and materials must include as many substitutes for the "demonstration farm" in agriculture as possible, i.e., opportunities for direct observation and sharing of new practices among classroom teachers.

Because of the demand for revision and change, local school systems will be faced with a variety of curriculum adoption possibilities. Educators, boards of education, and parents must be helped to become sophisticated about the criteria of creative decision-making in this area of curriculum adoption.

Once the adoption decision is reached, teachers and administrators must decide how it fits within the context of the existing curriculum. There are several alternatives: finding time for the social science units as supplementary to the existing curriculum, or substituting in some of the current social studies periods, or introducing the new material as part of science education, along with physical and biological science. Certainly, such a decision will not be final for curriculum planners or school systems; it will be open to review and change.

It is to be hoped that the national associations of social studies educators and of curriculum specialists will find ways of collaborating with the scientific associations and teams of social scientists who have become convinced that the frontiers of new knowledge and scientific method must become part of the challenge and perspective of students at all age levels. Because the frontiers of knowledge are moving so rapidly, curriculum revision and teacher reeducation must be a continuing adventure in collaboration.

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