

*The child must investigate ideas pertinent
to the new age . . .*

Criteria for Elementary Social Studies

J. D. McAULAY

Professor of Education

Pennsylvania State University, University Park

TODAY's social studies programs and their objectives are under searching examination.¹ Personnel in the nation's schools are carefully examining the status quo in this particular area of the curriculum. Countless school districts from Rose Tree Media in Pennsylvania² to Contra Costa, California³ are developing new and exciting social studies programs. Michaelis lists 21 national programs in the elementary social studies presently in the process of development and experimentation.⁴ Hill describes the same number of projects in the social sciences supported by public funds and suitable for the elementary school.⁵ Many curriculum coordinators, social studies supervisors, and assistant superintendents responsible for elementary education are concerned and confused.

Some types of guidelines or criteria are necessary to give them a basis for evaluation and judgment of the new social studies. The following standards might serve as initial guidelines to determine the pertinence of a new social studies program.

1. *Is the social studies program so constructed that its focus is the involvement of children?* If the essence of the program is expository or descriptive, it is not very new or different. It should allow the child to initiate self-discovery, on his level of maturity and interest, into the reality of his socio-political environment. He should be allowed to set up a hypothesis, then go about collecting evidence to

¹Charlotte Crabtree. "Inquiry Approaches to Learning Concepts and Generalizations in Social Studies." *Social Education* 30 (6): 407; October 1966.

²"Developing Effective Citizenship Through a Conceptual-Interdisciplinary Approach in Social Studies Curriculum." Rose Tree Media School District, Lima, Pennsylvania, January 1, 1967.

³Hilda Taba and James L. Hills. *Contra Costa Social Studies, Grades One to Six*. San Francisco, California: San Francisco State College, 1965.

⁴John U. Michaelis. *Directory of Social Studies Projects and Related Studies*. Berkeley, California: School of Education, University of California, Fall 1966.

⁵Wilhemina Hill. "United States Office of Education Social Studies Programs in Research for Elementary and Secondary Schools." Washington, D.C.: United States Office of Education, October 1966.

prove or disprove this hypothesis.⁶ True, he may not make revolutionary discoveries in his search for evidence, but the program should give him the opportunity to organize that method of attacking a problem which is the most efficient for him.

Thus, a worthy social studies program should indicate how much guidance and direction the teacher must give the child in helping him set up a hypothesis, collect appropriate materials, and use them effectively to test the hypothesis. Too, the program should give sufficient aid to the teacher in how he might develop, with some confidence and security, a method of teaching which truly involves the individual child.

The acceleration of knowledge proceeds at such a rapid pace, mores and folkways change so quickly that there are few social verities which any program can claim. At best, a social studies structure can only help the child to organize a pattern or method for himself by which he may investigate and explore a particular interest, problem, or thesis.

2. *Is the new social studies program expandable?* In other words, can it be adjusted to a particular group of children in a particular geographic area? Unfortunately many of the new social studies programs, particularly those emanating from the universities, are geared for the college bound student or for the gifted child. A social studies program developed for Hawaii may not be suitable for Texas, no matter what the amount of adaptation.

The program should contain sufficient suggestions concerning activities, topics, and problems so that the teacher might select those which will initiate the program at his level of competence and preparation and at the socioeconomic and ability level of the children. The program should not be so rigidly structured that there is no allowance for the individual differences of teacher and children.

A child can only develop a model or process for social studies investigation by a careful selection and then by pulling together again. A process so developed gives the child meaning as to what is perceived. He begins to make deductions and inferences through the process of analysis and comparison. But such acquisition requires time filled with those experiences appropriate to the child's immediate environment.⁷ The social studies program must be sufficiently adjustable to allow children and teacher to adapt to their own situation.

The goals and objectives of the social studies program must be the total of all the goals and objectives of all individual teachers. A good social studies program helps the teacher to recognize the separate entities, to classify them, and to describe them for himself. Yet no program should be so structured that teachers must accept and follow it unflinchingly.

3. *Does the social studies program contain modern social problems which the child can comprehend?* It must contribute useful ideas, attitudes, and frames of

⁶ Byron G. Massialas and Jack Zevin. "Teaching Social Studies Through Discovery." *Social Education* 28 (7): 384; November 1964.

⁷ Edith P. Merritt. *Working with Children in Social Studies*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1966. p. 37.

reference which are pertinent to today's child in today's society. This is not to suggest that the social studies program ought to be narrowly utilitarian. Yet it must have some measure of utility within the social scene as it is presently operating.

By the year 2000, if population predictions are correct, there will be another world of people. The child presently enrolled in the elementary school will have to live as an adult in close proximity to persons who may have divergently different mores and values than his own. Thus, if the social studies program offers the study of inferences based on evidence of the physical needs of people, the child must also be confronted with the statement, "What is of value to these people?"⁸

A large majority of today's elementary school children will live as adults in an urban setting. It would seem pertinent that some aspect of the social studies program be concerned with city living. The child must be given some understanding of the present tumultuous changes in society and be given some help to meet change without trauma. The program must give some emphasis to the future for which, indirectly, the child is in process of preparation.

4. *Is the social studies program objective?* The materials and areas of exploration with which the child is expected to work should not completely involve his own emotional patterns and feelings. If the area of inquiry, for example, concerns civil rights, then the questions to be studied and the materials with which the child will work should be as unbiased and objective as possible. They should reflect the position or platform of more than one particular group or creed. The child in organizing basic concepts should explore all those big ideas which color and energize a particular field of inquiry.⁹ Objective information allows the child to unlock the door of a social problem and to understand its complex edifice.

The learning activities which the child is expected to perform should revolve around reading requirements or research possibilities which cover as many sides of the hypothesis as is feasible. The program must be so organized that careful consideration can be given to the complexity of the intellectual tasks with which each child is to involve himself. Then some objectivity is possible for that child within the learning activity.

The amount of honest inquiry engaged in by the child will be in direct proportion to the amount of objective material the program contains. It is only thus the child can go beyond present skills and knowledge to produce creatively new and different applications and interpretations. A program that is based on subjective judgments alone cannot, even in its simplest form, help the child develop new perceptions and new discoveries.

5. Finally, *does the social studies program help the child to hold multiple loyalties?* Modern communication has so dissolved national boundaries that the

⁸ Bruce R. Joyce. *Strategies for Elementary Social Science Education*. Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1965. p. 52.

⁹ Jerome Bruner. *The Process of Education*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960. p. 22.

child should have, not only a loyalty to his immediate social and national group, but also to mankind everywhere. His love of country must not blind him to the needs and problems of other peoples. The world has become too small, too interdependent to allow the development of a narrow patriotism. On the child's level of maturity he must come to understand man's search for survival in a world situation threatened by nuclear holocaust.

A social studies program for today's school should help the child put himself in the other fellow's shoes. It should give him a thorough understanding of his American heritage and how this is integrated into other cultures and ways of life. The child should become acquainted not only with the world society but also the community or nation as a cell within the larger human complex. Today it is becoming increasingly difficult to single out one right way to live and behave. An awareness of alternative values and loyalties may well prove to be the most important understanding a child should secure from the social studies program.¹⁰

It would seem essential that a modern social studies program for the elementary school must meet one or more of these criteria if it is to be effective for the child of the space age. Facts and information a program must have, not for the inherent value of information alone but rather because the content exemplifies or illustrates an important basic concept which will be essential for a citizen of the twenty-first century. The child in his social studies program must be allowed to investigate ideas which are pertinent to the new age. Otherwise, as Marshall McLuhan has indicated, the social studies program will be a desert in an oasis when it should be an oasis in the desert. ☞

¹⁰ Phyllis Lieberman and Sidney B. Simon. "Vitalizing Student Research Reports." *Social Education* 28 (1): 2 and 4; January 1964.

CURRICULUM MATERIALS 1968

**ASCD Curriculum Materials Exhibit
Annual Conference, Atlantic City, New Jersey
March 10-14, 1968**

- Indispensable for supervisors, curriculum workers, teachers, administrators, and librarians.
- Lists new curriculum guides, courses of study, and instructional materials, classified by grade level and subject area.
- Represents many school systems and state departments of education.

Pages: 76

Price: \$2.00

**Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036**

Copyright © 1968 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.