

IN THE PURSUIT OF THE PUEBLUSIVE NEW



THERE can be little doubt that an impressive amount of innovative effort has been invested in the revision of the social studies curriculum in the past decade. A hundred or more major curriculum development projects were funded at extraordinarily high levels. Twenty-six of those are reviewed and evaluated in the November 1972 issue of *Social Education*. If one adds to this list the several hundred school districts that revised their social studies programs in recent years, the activity in this one area of the curriculum has been very substantial, indeed.

Reform Efforts

Yet in surveying these efforts and evaluating their impact on school practices, one is forced to conclude that they have not, by any stretch of the imagination, revolutionized social studies education. A social studies teacher of the early 1950's, who kept abreast of contemporary affairs and current in his scholarly reading, could return to many social studies classrooms in the 1970's and feel quite at home. The curriculum projects of the 1960's, whatever their individual merits, have simply not had a profound effect on the social studies curriculums of this nation.

The social studies programs that predated the reform efforts of the 1960's were

generally of two types. First there were those that were highly pupil-centered and activity-oriented. They were direct descendants of ideas growing out of the Progressive Movement. At the elementary school level, these programs were characterized by their use of the comprehensive unit of work as an organizing framework. Social studies units were to serve as unifying centers of the total elementary school curriculum. At the secondary school level these programs took the form of the core curriculum, life adjustment, and so-called block programs that combined elements of social studies, language arts, and the humanities. The programs at both the elementary and secondary levels emphasized *process* outcomes; subject matter played an essential, but subordinate, role.

The second type of program common in the 1950's was the fact-oriented, history-geography centered traditional approach to social studies. In its worst form it was and is often caricatured to represent all of the unfortunate practices associated with lecture-textbook teaching—reading, reciting, memorizing, answering questions. In its better form, and in the hands of an imaginative and inspiring teacher, this approach helped learners develop a deep and abiding love for the substance of social studies—history, geography, government. Undoubtedly many of the curriculum reformers of the 1960's were first inspired to a lifetime commitment

SOCIAL STUDIES

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to the study of history or one of the social sciences by some teacher or teachers using approaches of this second type. Certainly the subject-centered, traditional programs were much more numerous throughout the country than were the pupil-centered, activity type.

It is significant that both of these approaches to social studies education came under criticism from the reformers of the early 1960's. The activity-type programs were found wanting because of their substantive thinness. Moreover, the nature of pupil involvement in them gave the impression that such classrooms were "play schools," thereby associating them with the late Progressive Movement, the latter always a target for criticism and ridicule. With Sputnik orbiting the earth, the nation was in no mood for play schools. It wanted work schools.

The traditional programs also drew fire. They were criticized because they (a) placed too much emphasis on memorization of facts, (b) were often inaccurate in subject matter or in emphasis, (c) ignored large portions of the world, (d) were dominated by history and geography, (e) developed little depth of understanding, (f) did not develop independent methods of inquiry, (g) relied too heavily on expository teaching procedures. Other criticisms could be added to this list. Suffice it to say there was little problem in

making a case for the need of a major overhaul of the social studies curriculum. But who was to lead social studies out of the wilderness?

The Decision Makers

A fact of profound importance to an understanding of social studies reform of the early 1960's period is the extent to which important decision makers (that is, those who controlled funds for curriculum reform, namely the USOE, the NSF, and the foundations) and the shapers of public opinion were influenced by scholars from the various disciplines. This was true, of course, not only for social studies but for other curriculum areas as well. Teachers and most particularly what the scholars called "educationists" had little or no role to play in these efforts. As a result, the proposals and projects designed to reform the social studies curriculum reflected a strong discipline bias. The reform model used in developing the "new math" and the "new science" was applied to social studies as well. Accordingly, curriculum projects focusing on economics, anthropology, geography, history, and sociology began to emerge. There was talk at that time

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of the development of "teacher-proof" curriculums to be prepared presumably by historians and social scientists in order that teachers and educationists could not mess things up. These early reform efforts stressed these ideas:

1. The structure of the disciplines
2. A focus on basic concepts from the disciplines
3. The methods of inquiry of the disciplines, especially what was called (probably incorrectly) *inductive* procedures.

Quite naturally, the reformers were critical of teachers for their lack of knowledge of history and the social sciences. Thus, an attempt was made on a massive scale to retrain (or less kindly, retread) practicing teachers. Thousands of teachers attended summer and year-long institutes sponsored and paid for by the USOE, the NSF, or by one of the private foundations. In these institutes teachers were to become familiarized with the latest ideas from history, geography, economics, sociology, or anthropology.¹ Presumably this new knowledge would be needed by the teacher as he began implementing one of the hundred or more new social studies curriculums then under development.

By the late 1960's, certainly by the end of 1968, it was clear that these approaches to the reform of the social studies curriculum were not productive, and the direction of change shifted significantly. The reasons for this shift were in part these:

1. A growing militancy on the part of

¹ Regrettably these same institute directors and instructors were doing little, if anything, to change their regular campus courses in these subjects, nor were they doing much to change the teacher education programs on their campuses that produced teachers who immediately needed a re-training program to bring them up-to-date.

minority groups and an increased sensitivity to racism

2. Increased concern for relevancy
3. Widespread questioning of many values embraced by this society, particularly the nation's involvement in the Vietnam War
4. Demands for participatory democracy and involvement, with a corresponding questioning of the credibility of the authority in a field
5. Introduction and legitimization of varying life styles
6. Rise in strength of the counter culture
7. A serious breakdown in society's capacity to cope with citizen dissatisfaction as evidenced by rioting, burning of cities, assassinations, culminating in the shootings at Kent State and Jackson State.

In view of these developments, the academic approaches being advocated by the reformers made little sense. Looking back, even after this short a time, it does seem strange, indeed, that while the reformers were searching for basic concepts from the disciplines, society was desperately searching for its soul.

The Important Questions

As we moved into the 1970's, therefore, those on the forefront of social studies reform were concerning themselves with quite different matters than their colleagues were a few years earlier. The search for basic concepts was behind, as were shopworn arguments about whether programs should be single subject or interdisciplinary, whether there should be social science or social studies education. Gone, too, were the illusions or dreams of a packaged K-12 social studies program that would work well anywhere if teachers were trained how to use it. Today anyone who is concerned with social studies curriculum development *must* address himself to such questions as these:

1. How can social studies programs be made more meaningful, more highly individualized, and, most important, more *personal* for learners?
2. How can the in-school social studies

program be related to the out-of-school lives of pupils?

3. How can the concepts and content of the social sciences, history, and humanities be used to provide pupils with insights about the world in which they live?

4. How can social studies programs realistically and truthfully depict the diversity of racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds of the people of this country?

5. How can social studies education become a vital force in combating the evils of racism that flow through the bloodstream of this society?

6. How can social studies programs help pupils build values consistent with the democratic traditions of this society?

7. How can social studies programs help pupils build skills that will enable them to learn how to learn and keep on learning about their social world for a lifetime?

8. How can the social studies program help the learner become a more effective decision maker?

9. How can the social studies program help learners grasp the reality of our international involvements—socially, economically, militarily?

Although the project approaches to curriculum revision have been disappointing in their results, the past 10-12 years have not been without their lessons for us. Actually, much of value has come from these efforts. The use of basic ideas as organizing frameworks for the substantive components of social studies seems to be firmly established, as is the increasing attention being given to inquiry, valuing, reflective thinking, and active social participation by students. There is continued search for ways to represent social reality accurately, to extend the content base of social studies education beyond the conventional disciplines, even beyond the social sciences to include the humanities. Innovative use of various teaching procedures and the use of multimedia are growing.

Most important, *some* of the better social studies teachers seem to be helping *some* of the students come to grips with *some* of the great social issues of our times. All of these represent positive gains.

Our experiences with the projects should have taught us that when it comes to curriculums, the home-grown variety is the one that is most likely to survive. Curriculums do not transplant well in a highly decentralized system of education such as ours.

It is to the credit of the major publishers that they have incorporated the best of the ideas generated by reform efforts of the past decade into their programs. Instructional resources are much more in tune with emerging ideas than they were a decade ago. Today a teacher will have no problem finding materials that are conceptually based, inquiry oriented, interdisciplinary, and honestly present the social reality that surrounds young people.

A hopeful sign for the continued revision of social studies education is the work now under way in revising preservice teacher education. With the blending of preservice and in-service education of teachers into one continuous program of professional development, the time lag between development and implementation should be greatly reduced. The closer linkages between and among historians and social scientists, social studies educators, and practicing teachers in the schools should certainly contribute to constructive work in social studies curriculum development, as well as improved teacher education.

The great challenge facing social studies and, indeed, all of education in the years ahead is to teach young human beings how to live with each other peacefully, compassionately, and, above all, charitably. Perhaps the curriculum efforts of the 1960's were necessary in order that social studies programs might, at long last, begin moving in those directions in the 1970's. □

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