

The Way I See It... **History and Geography Should Be Scrapped**

Paul F. Schumann

I'd like to hasten a movement that has little impetus at the moment, namely that of scrapping conventional history and geography in our schools. One aphorism states that those who don't know history are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past. In reality, how many people are in a position to make momentous decisions—the checker at the local supermarket? the assembly-line worker in the aircraft industry? the dentist you see twice a year?

Another cliché states that students need to know their place in the "grand design." Although that may be desirable, I doubt that typical citizens, after 12 years of schooling, have any concept of their place in the larger picture. And I doubt that in later life they have more than a superficial impression of Millard Fillmore, James Polk, the exports of Uruguay, the imports of Bolivia, or the mountain chains of Colombia.

I weep each spring when I see thousands of high school students approach their study of the Civil War in American history classes while dozens of contemporary social and political problems go undiscussed. Countless seniors study the steps by which a bill becomes a law and memorize the names of constantly-changing presidential Cabinet members, but don't even have a rudimentary understanding of consumer economics or a knowledge of how to balance a checkbook. They graduate from high school after memorizing stray pieces of data unrelated to the world in which they will live.



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I say let's scrap conventional history and geography, grades four through 12, and start from a new philosophical perspective.

Work in Community

In the high school years, let's require that young people give of themselves to their communities by working at least one semester in or for convalescent homes, homes for the aged, mental hospitals, recreation departments, community agencies, and drug abuse clinics. Additionally, they might be given school credit for performing tutorial services or for participating in church-related social service activities. Naturally, there are major logistical problems in placing high school students out in the community, but it is amazing how teenagers mature when thrust into the adult world.

I recommend that at the high school level we also build in two nine-week blocks of psychology—what makes us tick, what are our

values, what is life all about, where are we going and where have we been—in a deeply personal sense. As our divorce rate climbs, teachers need to assist youth in coping with one another. We never give significant school time for this.

Rather than a Cook's tour of the world, I would concentrate study on six to eight contemporary cultures, and curtail the current full year of tenth-grade tourism. Elements of real-world anthropology might be incorporated to the degree that students are able to handle this discipline. For some, a rudimentary introduction to philosophy would also be valid.

I would further mandate the study of sociology through contemporary social problems indigenous to the school's community. These would supplement the study of major national problems: poverty, the need for meaningful work; governmental influence on citizens; media and their hold over us; and integration.

Logic or critical thinking should also be taught in today's high schools (or earlier). We are unable to follow facts to logical conclusions, and I don't think conventional history programs develop this vital human power.

A solid quarter of consumer economics should be required. How to buy wisely, how to select time payment plans at reasonable costs, how to figure out one's income tax, how to select sound insurance plans—these are fundamental concepts that can and must be taught to all youth.

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Science

Are you looking for a planning guide for your own up-to-date science and technology museum? If so, you need a copy of *Starting a Science Center?* (funded by the National Science Foundation). This step-by-step planning guide will give you an overview of objectives, clientele, cost, sources of support, location, type of building, amount of space, governing board, form of organization, staffing, types of exhibits, educational programming, community service, communication, and accountability. The appendix lists a representative group of small, medium, and large science centers you can visit. Order the illustrated guide from Association of Science-Technology Centers, 1016 16th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. The cost is \$5.

Health

How effective is your school health program? Have you any concerns about federal priorities in health education? Would you be interested in reading/skimming a task force document that can tip you off as to where the public health service plans to direct its educational efforts? If so, you can order *Disease Prevention & Health Promotion: Federal Programs and Prospects*, a 210-page paperback that examines health status goals, strategies for action, current HEW activities and gaps, federal prevention activities outside HEW, prevention priorities, and recommendations. Order by stock number (017-001-00418-9) for \$4.50 from Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

VideoKits

You may be able to put together a low-cost classroom video program by looking into VideoKits, an array of packaged collections of instructional video materials. Two of the special

collections cover Early Childhood and Primary Economics. Others include Inside/Out (health), MeasureMetric, Self-Incorporated (junior-high life coping skills), Discovering (intermediate science), Tomorrow's Families (parenting for senior high students), The Write Channel (grades three-four writing), and others. For information about VideoKits, write Agency for

Instructional Television, Box A, Bloomington, Indiana 47402. Also available: AIT's 1980 Catalog of Television and Instructional Materials, featuring almost 100 instructional series for TV broadcast or purchase in various audiovisual formats. AIT has regional offices in Atlanta, Georgia; Reston, Virginia; and San Mateo, California.

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Schools have begun to give career education its rightful place in the curriculum; however, such efforts need better coordination and more widespread implementation than we see at present.

A Better Social Studies Curriculum

In sum, what would a high school social studies curriculum look like?

Ninth-grade social studies might focus on career education, several contemporary social issues, two or three brief anthropological studies, a unit on the emerging adolescent (with emphasis on sex education and the physiological changes teenagers experience), and a unit of simulation activities dealing with political power and democratic decision-making processes.

Tenth grade would focus on a half-dozen contemporary societies, contrasting and comparing them with our society. Two American sociological problems might then be explored. Six or seven of our distinguished presidents and their contributions to our greatness might also be incorporated here.

Eleventh- and twelfth-grade social studies might be taught in

an intertwining way with emphasis on logical thinking (not masked as history), further study of what makes humans human, consumer economics, some analysis of futuristics and fast-developing change, a unit on media and its influence on us, nine weeks on American government (at least half of which would be local and none of which would be memorized material), a unit on parenting (probably the most difficult role we play in life), the development of a personal philosophy of life, problems of adjustment to adulthood following high school graduation, and a half-year of social service in the local community. A variety of elective courses should naturally be available. This new focus, though, would put an end to the conspicuously ineffectual history courses currently offered.

If social studies courses don't speak to the personal needs of teenagers and assist them in grappling with contemporary political and economic problems, where will people find the answers they seek? Sadly, the reality of the curriculum outlined here is a good 50 years or more away. I think our citizenry deserves it sooner! *EL*

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