

SOME SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHING

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Experimentation in social studies teaching today is far less spectacular than it was a few years ago, but significant alterations are being made in hundreds of schools throughout the United States. Better aims are being formulated, better forms of organization devised, better methods instituted, better materials produced, and better means of evaluation introduced. Slowly but steadily social studies teaching is being changed and in most cases improved. Many of these modifications are not yet widespread enough to call them trends, but they certainly can be called significant developments.

Social studies teachers from the primary grades through graduate schools are beginning to apply the findings of social science research in their classrooms, schools and communities. The lag between discovery and application is still too great, but the progress is nevertheless encouraging. It is especially heartening in view of the shortage of adequately trained and properly paid teachers, in spite of attacks upon schools, and in the face of the meager resources with which most teachers operate.

It is obviously impossible to enumerate all the significant developments in social studies teaching in a short article. Nor can one elaborate upon each of the changes mentioned. One can, however, list some of the significant changes in the hope that classroom teachers will explore further those areas in which they are lagging behind the frontier thinkers and practitioners in social studies teaching. For such a purpose the writer would like to enumerate seven areas in which there seem to be important gains or in which promising experimentation is now being conducted.

More and Better Knowledge About Pupils

Within recent years a vast amount of knowledge has been acquired by authorities in such areas as child growth and development, psychology, psychiatry, and mental health. The fundamental needs, motivations and drives of children and youth are thus becoming clearer. Experts have studied in detail individual differences and basic similarities among American children and youth.

Through the research and writings of Cole, Gesell, Olson, Prescott, Redl, Strang, Zachary and many others this new-found knowledge has been interpreted in terms of teaching. Consequently, alert social studies teachers today have rich resources for understanding individual behavior and for diagnosing the needs of their pupils.

Techniques for studying children have also been devised and are available to teachers. As a result, tests of various kinds, diary records, autobiographies, rating scales, interviews and similar devices are now being used cautiously but increasingly by teachers who are alert to their possibilities. This increased and improved knowledge about pupils is perhaps the most significant development affecting social studies teaching in recent years.

More and Better Knowledge About Groups

Quite recently the study of group behavior has been accelerated and new vistas have been opened into the functioning of various groups in society. In this significant research sociologists, social psychologists, and anthropologists have been particularly productive, often collaborating on significant projects.

One important aspect of such research has been the collection of data on the importance of social class status in the lives of children and youth presented in such volumes as Warner, Havighurst and Loeb's *Who Shall Be Educated?* (Harpers, 1944), A. B. Hollingshead's *Elmtown's Youth: The Impact of Social Classes on Adolescents* (Wiley, 1949), and Celia Stendler's *Children of Brastown* (University of Illinois, 1949). To date the emphasis has been chiefly upon diagnosing the evils rather than suggesting solutions. But these studies can have a powerful impact upon social studies teaching in the years ahead.

Another important aspect of such research has been the inquiry into group processes begun by the late Kurt Lewin and carried on by his colleagues in the Group Dynamics Movement. Many social studies teachers have already been affected by this movement and have improved their understanding of group behavior and their classroom techniques as a result of these studies. The literature of the field is extensive, but teachers may find two volumes particularly helpful: Ruth Cunningham's *Understanding Group Behavior of Boys and Girls* (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951) and the compilation of articles contained in Kenneth Benne and Bozidar Muntyan's *Human Relations in Curriculum Change* (Dryden, 1951).

The study of group life should profoundly influence teachers since they are vitally concerned with the analysis of various forms of society. These studies should also help them prepare boys and girls to discharge their civic responsibilities.

Greater Knowledge of the Learning Process

Closely related to the first two points is the increasingly precise knowledge developed both on the learning process itself and about the types of learning experiences which should be provided for children and youth. This is not a new field by any means, but there has been a significant shift in the last few years from an emphasis on presenting content to the guidance of pupil learning, from teacher-dominated and teacher-directed learning to pupil-selected and teacher-guided learning, from emphasis upon memorization of content to stress on attitude formation and behavioral change.

This, too, is a broad topic and one of great importance to social studies teachers. It has been considered so significant by The National Society for the Study of Education that it devoted its 49th Yearbook to *Learning and Instruction* (University of Chicago, 1950).

Perhaps the most important shift in social studies instruction growing out of current knowledge of the learning process is the emphasis upon problem solving. Social studies teachers are becoming keenly aware of the interest which is aroused in pupils and of the dynamic learning which takes place when individual and group research is encouraged.

From the realization of this aspect of learning has also come the current emphasis upon unit teaching, which is modifying teaching at all levels. Increased pupil-teacher planning, a wider variety of learning experiences to meet individual interests and needs, and projects which involve action for personal or socio-civic improvement are concomitants of this emphasis upon problem solving and unit organization.

Teachers concerned with exploring such concepts of learning will find many references available, ranging from Ruth Strickland's pamphlet on "How to Build a Resource Unit" (U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946) to Quillen and Hanna's *Education for Civic Competence* (Scott Foresman, 1948), Burton's *Guidance of Learning Activities* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), and H. H. Giles' *Teacher-Pupil Planning* (Harper, 1941).

A Broader Concept of the Social Studies

The foregoing factors, plus others not mentioned here, have resulted in a broader concept of the social studies than prevailed a few years ago. History still claims a disproportionate share in the social studies, and subject matter boundaries are guarded zealously by many secondary school teachers and college professors. But the social studies as a broad field has gradually emerged in the elementary school and is making headway in the high schools. In colleges and teacher education institutions area studies, survey courses and broad field studies, such as those in American Culture, are being adopted more widely. Inter-disciplinary cooperation has a long way to go before it becomes effective in most institutions, but there is an increasing emphasis upon this approach. Probably the most important area in which work needs to be done is in the development of broad social science programs in teacher education institutions so that teachers may be ready to cope wisely and well with ideas from the various social studies disciplines.

Here and there across the country the core curriculum has attracted supporters, and an increasing number of teachers are beginning to see opportunities for more effective social studies learning through the wise use of their subject matter fields. Certainly one of the desirable developments in social studies teaching in the years ahead, particularly at the high school level, is the integration of social studies with other subject matter areas.

For further exploration of this controversial area teachers are urged to turn to Harold Alberty's *Reorganizing the High-School Curriculum* (Macmillan, 1947), the Educational Policies Commission's *Education for All-American Youth* (National Education Association, 1944), and Faunce and Bossing's *Developing the Core Curriculum* (Prentice-Hall, 1951).

Teacher Participation in Curriculum Construction

In the past, and in far too many places at the present time, courses of study have been determined by the boards of education, textbook publishers or small committees of teachers. Once determined, they have been "handed down" to teachers for implementation in classrooms.

Fortunately there has been progress in involving teachers in the complicated and important process of curriculum revision. A few schools and

school systems encourage teachers to develop courses of study with the help of their students. This technique seems to this writer to be the highest rung of the curriculum construction ladder. Few administrators are ready to permit such freedom and far too few teachers are ready to function with such freedom.

More schools, however, are ready for teacher participation in outlining goals of social studies teaching, in preparing suggestions for learning experiences, in compiling lists of suitable resources and in suggesting possible means of evaluation. The movement toward the preparation of resource units for classroom teachers is a highly commendable one and augurs well for the future of social studies teaching. This is one of the most effective means of in-service education for teachers and as such should be encouraged. It is also an effective means of breaking the strangle-hold which textbooks and required courses of study have had upon social studies teachers.

Teachers concerned with curriculum construction would profit greatly by familiarizing themselves with the several publications of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, such as the 1949 Yearbook entitled *Toward Better Teaching* and the 1951 Yearbook on *Action for Curriculum Improvement*, or by reading George Sharp's stimulating volume on *Curriculum Development as Re-Education of the Teacher* (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951).

Changes in Emphases in Social Studies Teaching

As social studies teachers have learned more about the needs of children and youth at the various stages of their development, and as they have become more acutely aware of the changing needs of society, they have called for revisions in the so-called "content" of the social studies. Their service on committees for curriculum construction has placed them in strategic positions, too, for achieving their objectives. Community pressures have often been a help in this process, as have the indirect influences of boys and girls. The net effect of these various influences has been a gradual change in social studies emphases at almost all levels. At least five topics have attracted increasing attention in recent years.

One such topic is the attention given to personal problems of pupils. Some attention is being given in many schools to these problems throughout the several years of education. There has been a noticeable increase in attention to such problems in the junior high school social studies curriculum and in the twelfth grade problems of democracy courses. Problems of individual health, of social relationships, of vocational choice, of heterosexual adjustment and of consumer education have been emphasized. This is a highly significant development—one to which most social studies teachers will give hearty approval. Those teachers not already acquainted with this field, or those desiring more information, would do well to examine the various publications of the Science Research Associates (Chicago), the bulletins in the "Life Adjustment" series of the U. S. Office of Education as well as some of the newer texts in the social studies.

A second area receiving increased attention is that of democratic civic education. A perusal of the past 48 volumes of *The Proceedings* of the Middle States Council for the Social Studies would dispel any question as to the continuing importance of this field, for this has long been a major aim of social studies teaching. In recent years, moreover, there has been renewed interest and increased experimentation in this field. The work of the Detroit Public Schools, the pioneering efforts of Syracuse University, and the more recent civic education projects at Teachers College, Columbia and Harvard University attest to this new emphasis. Social studies teachers will find the 22nd Yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies, *Education for Democratic Citizenship* the most complete compendium of information now available in this important area.

Closely allied with the renewed interest in civic education is the new impetus for studying current affairs. In far too many schools such study is isolated from "regular" social studies content, but there is a noticeable interest in this field and an awakened consciousness of its importance. Detailed statements regarding this development are to be found in such volumes as Lucien Kinney and Reginald Bell's *Better Teaching Through the Use of Current Materials* (Stanford University Press, 1948), the *New York Times*' survey as summarized in *Current Affairs and Modern Education* (New York Times, 1950) and the 21st Yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies *The Teaching of Contemporary Affairs* (1950), edited by John Payne.

Intercultural education has likewise stepped into the foreground of the social studies field at both the elementary and secondary school levels, and more recently in teacher education institutions. Most teachers are familiar with this trend, and many members of the Middle States Council have been active in this movement; therefore it does not need elaboration at this point. For those desiring the latest information on this phase of social studies teaching, reference is made to the several publications of the American Council on Education, ranging from *Elementary Curriculum in Intergroup Relations* and *Secondary Curriculum in Intergroup Relations* to *Intergroup Relations in Teacher Education* and *College Programs in Intergroup Education*.

Finally there is the field of international or world affairs. With the catapulting of the United States into the position of the leading power has come a realization of the need for more and better teaching about the world. There has been much floundering in this field to date and general bewilderment both as to what to teach and how to teach it, but considerable thought is going on and some progress seems to have been made. Few schools have developed the kind of first-hand contacts with persons from abroad which social psychologists have stressed as of great importance in discovering similarities and in understanding differences. But many schools have begun to avail themselves of the many excellent films on other lands and peoples and on world problems; these often prove an effective substitute for personal contacts. Far too often teaching about the United Nations stresses structure, but attempts are being made here and there to extend, for example, the problem-solving approach to this comparatively new field.

This problem of education for world-mindedness needs the most careful thinking and imaginative planning of social studies teachers. Elementary school people will find much to stimulate their thinking in Delia Goetz's booklet, "World Understanding Begins with Children" (U. S. Government Printing Office, 1949), and college teachers will profit from several suggestions in Howard Wilson's *The Universities and World Affairs* (Carnegie Endowment, 1952). Elementary and secondary school teachers may also find some suggestions in the writer's *World Horizons for Teachers* (Teachers College, Columbia, 1952).

More and Better Resources for Teaching

Tremendous progress has been made in the last few years in the variety of resources available to social studies teachers and in the quality of many of the materials. Teachers at the elementary school level, and increasingly at the secondary school and college levels, are using the community and its citizens as resources for first-hand, concrete experiences. A few teacher education institutions have recently begun to give prospective teachers experience in community centers and settlement houses to better acquaint them with children and with group processes. With this background and experience teachers should be in a position to take advantage of community resources in their instruction. This increasing use of the community is one of the most promising practices in current social studies teaching.

The studies of textbooks undertaken under the auspices of the American Council on Education have been extremely revealing in their findings and seem to have influenced publishers and writers to a considerable degree. Studies in readability and in typography have brought about many needed reforms in textbooks. Gradually some of the changes in social studies "content" suggested in previous parts of this article are beginning to be reflected in social studies texts. Compared with the textbooks in most other countries, ours are extremely good—though most of us think we know how they could be improved. It is doubtful, however, whether continued progress will be possible with the current pernicious pressures on writers and publishers.

Although audio-visual materials, especially TV, have not been used as widely or as well as they should have been, they have made a distinct contribution to social studies teaching in recent years. Films, filmstrips, recordings, Kodachrome slides, maps, and other materials are now available in large quantity; some of them are relatively inexpensive, and many are of high quality. Social studies teachers are beginning to learn the values of such materials and to use them in improving the quality of learning.

Conclusion

In this cursory view of significant developments in social studies teaching the writer had tried to present the major areas in which he feels noticeable progress is being made. At the same time he should like to mention a few of the areas which call for attention now and in the years immediately ahead. One of these is the question of developing values.

Another is evaluation—a field in which there was considerable progress a few years ago but which has lately been neglected. A third is attention to gifted children. A fourth is the use of creative activities, particularly in secondary school programs. And a fifth is the development of world-mindedness, despite the progress noted above.

Frontier thinkers and practitioners are often discouraged by the state of social studies teaching; the writer hopes that this brief glance at the broad field of social studies teaching will leave readers with the conviction that progress is being made and that this in turn will encourage the exploration of new and unfamiliar areas.



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