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ROOM 749, 53 W. JACKSON BLVD.,
CHICAGO, ILL. 80603

301.001

JAMES M. BECKER
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Developing A Social Studies Program

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SPUTNIK, the pressure of world events, and, the change in the public mood regarding the role of the federal government have created a mid-century revolution in American education. Already major changes are noticeable, especially in high school math and science, changes which reflect both new knowledge and improved treatment of traditional topics. Social studies education is beginning to receive the same attention.

Currently many state and local systems are reviewing existing programs, examining numerous proposals, holding a variety of meetings, and disseminating bulletins and guidelines designed to prod their social studies offerings into the space age.

The injection of massive amounts of federal aid into the bloodstream of education creates new opportunities and challenges, especially at the state and local levels. Will there be enough imagination, creativity, and efficiency to make optimum use of this support?

Most educators view the many new national and regional social studies projects as rich resources for improving local programs. However, if the products and recommendations of these studies are to be effectively related to local efforts, an agonizing reappraisal must take place at the individual school system level.

Unless we devise some mechanism for

assessing and relating the results of research to on-going practices, the experimental projects and programs may produce increased frustration rather than improved programs. To date, there have been few attempts at any level to determine which of the available programs are most appropriate in terms of a particular school's goals or whether the innovations being sought are consistent with one another or foster common purposes.

Although there are fashions in education and the decision of some school superintendents and state authorities carry more weight than others, the quality of American education is largely determined by the wisdom and efficiency of thousands of local school officials. One of their more difficult responsibilities is curriculum building which involves such varied elements as: (1) determining goals, purposes, and objectives; (2) selecting and effectively utilizing content, methods, and techniques; (3) providing in-service and pre-service training for teachers; and (4) developing an evaluation program.

Most schools have committees or individuals assigned to work on curriculum. In these changing times, it is doubtful whether a school could operate efficiently without these unceasing efforts to examine what is being done and what ought to be done in light of changing conditions and new evidence.

This paper attempts to outline some considerations which may prove useful in reviewing existing and proposed programs. It has been written to promote discussion and encourage self-evaluation, rather than to map out an arbitrary

DR. BECKER is Director of the Foreign Relations Project of the North Central Association; is Associate Chairman of the Curriculum Committee, National Council for the Social Studies; is a member of the Commission on International Understanding, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; and has served as curriculum consultant for many schools.

plan. Some of the major criticisms of current offerings in social studies are listed; efforts to create new programs are discussed; and some characteristics of an adequate program are proposed.

The Current Social Studies Curriculum

In response to the pressure of world events brought close to home by a revolutionized technology and spurred on by radical changes in the physical sciences, mathematics, and languages, social scientists in the universities and high schools are raising questions of purpose, direction, materials, structure, content, and training of teachers. They are proposing many changes—in fact, it seems everyone is doing, or at least saying, something about curriculum revision in the social studies.

The pattern of course offerings in most schools seems to have changed little since 1916. Yet the lack of change in course titles does not necessarily imply that their content has remained the same. This dualism—the perpetuation of familiar course titles on the one hand, and the acknowledged addition of new materials on the other—creates problems in any scrutiny of social studies offerings.

* Almost a half century ago, the Committee on Social Studies recommended a sequence of course offerings:

- Grade 9: Community civics
- Grade 10: European (or world) history
- Grade 11: American history
- Grade 12: American social, economic and political problems¹

Surveys made during the past five years reveal that the typical pattern of course offerings still mirrors the 1916 recommendations.² The model course offerings

* This section draws upon "Profile of the Current Secondary Social Studies Curriculum in North Central Association Schools," by Bertram A. Masia, *The North Central Association Quarterly*, 1962, 38 (No. 1), pp. 71-76.

¹ Erling N. Hunt, "Changing Perspectives in the Social Studies." In Erling M. Hunt, et al. *High School Social Studies Perspectives* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 14.

² Willis D. Moreland, Curriculum trends in social studies, *Social Education*, 1962, 26, 73-76. *What High School Pupils Study*, Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Wel-

today are, civics in grade 9, world history in grade 10, American history in grade 11, and in grade 12, either a) a one-year course in American problems; b) a one-year course in government; or c) a combination one-semester course in economics and a one-semester course in government. The content of the government-economics sequence generally correlates very highly with the content of the problems course. Almost all social studies requirements are accounted for by the courses listed above.

Furthermore, the presence of electives does not necessarily mean that the social studies curriculum is broadened. The most commonly offered electives are also among the most frequently required courses.

Geography, international relations, and economics are the most frequently added course offerings.

It is clear that the catalogue of social studies courses of most high schools remains fairly constant. Rarely is a course dropped. A new course, invariably an elective, is added occasionally.

The surveys cited here raise a number of questions about the process, direction, and rate of change in social studies. What criteria are used in adding courses to or deleting them from the curriculum? Who determines when and whether a new unit should be added? On what basis are such judgments made—students' capacity to learn or teachers' willingness to teach? What roles do the following play in curriculum revision: i.e. school administration; faculty; university scholars; state or national legislation; the political and economic climate of the local, national, and international scene?

Also, what does the committee system accomplish? What would carefully selected teachers do if given time for curriculum planning? How can universities and high schools cooperate for mutual advantage? What processes are most efficient? Most creative?

fare, Bulletin No. 10, 1962. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962). Emlyn Jones, *Social Studies Requirements In An Age of Science and Mathematics*, *Social Education*, 1963, 27, p. 18.

Many of these questions must be answered at the local level if significant improvement is to be made in this important area of the curriculum.

Some Criticism

A widespread criticism already discussed is that social studies have changed relatively little in the past 50 years.

Other criticisms frequently leveled against secondary school social studies are:

1. Major emphasis is on factual knowledge and rote learning. Not enough attention is given to critical thinking, analysis, or interpretation.

2. In an attempt to teach values or good citizenship, many important facts are omitted or distorted to support what are believed to be desirable characteristics of the good citizen.

3. The *is* is not carefully distinguished from the *ought*. Facts, opinions, values, and attitudes are, so to speak, presented as one ball of wax.

4. A tremendous disparity exists between what is taught in the high school classroom and what is known as the result of the latest research in the various social science disciplines.

5. History and geography dominate the secondary school curriculum while such areas as political science, economics, sociology, and anthropology receive only incidental treatment.

6. Insufficient attention is given to international relations, and the study of non-Western countries and cultures. Not enough emphasis is placed upon the role of the United States in world affairs, comparative government, or comparative economic systems. The concepts, methods, and application of the various social science disciplines have not been integrated in such a way as to help the student view intelligently the world scene, or to grapple with personal or social problems.

Whether or not the criticisms listed here are wholly justified, they are often the rationale behind efforts to improve the curriculum. Furthermore, while there may be little general agreement on the precise changes needed, there is little argument that the teaching of social studies urgently needs improvement.

New Approaches

An excellent summary of projects, proposals, and experiments in the social studies is "New Frontiers in the Social Studies."³ Included in this volume is a list

³ *New Frontiers in the Social Studies*, by John Gibson, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, 1965.

of more than 35 special projects.⁴ Several of these programs—including six projects in history, six in economics, three in geography, two in anthropology, and one in sociology—emphasize improvements in teaching a particular subject. Such offerings have traditionally included a countless number of concepts and considered a wide variety of social situations, contemporary as well as historical. The result has generally been superficiality and a lack of depth in learning and insight.

These special projects demonstrate the fact that today a number of able historians, social scientists, and public school educators are cooperating in the attempt to identify certain key concepts and generalizations to be included in such programs. By reducing the number of concepts and generalizations, it will hopefully be possible to deepen insights and provide more knowledge about key ideas. Furthermore, it is assumed that such an approach will help students build a framework of basic ideas about society and culture into which new knowledge can be incorporated. These programs indicate a notable shift away from the traditional ground-covering, "fact-grubbing" approach to the teaching of social studies.

Recognizing that the mountainous accumulation of facts and materials often overwhelms students, many historians and social scientists now urge that emphasis be placed on developing a feeling for the discipline and its methods. Supplying road maps for the complicated terrain of the various disciplines becomes more important than surveying the entire area. The Secondary School History Committee in Amherst, Massachusetts is preparing materials designed to teach the methods of history as well as history itself. Every student is given the opportunity to experience some of the problems faced by historians in gathering, sorting and se-

⁴ John Michaelis, "A Directory of Current Social Studies Projects and Related Activities," Berkeley, California: University of California. (Mimeographed.)

lecting facts, as well as in interpreting and evaluating data. Students are encouraged to derive their own generalizations on an inductive basis, and to test them by applying them in new situations.⁵

Another innovator concerned with a structural approach within the discipline is Lawrence Senesh, a Purdue University economist.⁶ He has outlined the fundamental ideas in economics and charted their relationship as a basis for a program in economics for children in grades K-12.

In a somewhat similar vein, programs created by Educational Services, Inc.,⁷ are designed "to provide an introduction to some of the basic ideas of social science, to provide an introduction to the methods of social sciences, to the rules of evidence and the making and testing of hypotheses, to do all these things by creating educational materials and methods that allow children, in a sense, to be social scientists. To work through real problems as much as possible on their own, and to arrive at their own conclusions." The ESI statement and the growing number of programs demonstrate that learning by discovery is becoming a popular concept in the new social studies.

Other programs are concentrating on the attempt to establish the intellectual autonomy of the social studies, without, however, denying their dependence upon the social sciences for methods and materials. The Harvard Social Studies Project⁸ under Donald Oliver, and work by Samuel P. McCutchen,⁹ are examples of such programs.

⁵ History and Social Studies Curriculum Materials, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

⁶ Lawrence Senesh, Department of Economics, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana.

⁷ Elting E. Morison, "A Program of Curriculum Development in the Social Studies and Humanities," (1-12) Educational Services, Inc., 108 Water St., Watertown, Massachusetts.

⁸ Donald A. Oliver, "A Jurisprudential and Social Science Curriculum for Grades 8-10 Focusing on the Analysis of Controversial Public Issues," Graduate School of Education, Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁹ Samuel P. McCutchen, "A discipline for the Social Studies," *Social Education*, 27, 2 February 1963, pp. 61-65.

Other new approaches stem from an increasing emphasis on the study of human behavior by quantitative and experimental methods. Game theory (Guetzkow)¹⁰ is designed to deal with a wide range of situations and problems in terms of repetitive patterns of behavior and common aspects of phenomena. It involves two or more teams or individuals with objectives engaged in maneuvers for valued stakes.

Still other programs indicate a need for an increased concern with the processes of social and cultural change, a greater emphasis on international and intercultural exchange, renewed interest in the role of values in American society, and more consideration for Negro and Latin American influence in American life.

In addition to the experimental projects, several large scale attempts have been made to identify major concepts, ideas, and generalizations which might serve to structure the social studies and provide some tools for reaching dependable conclusions about human affairs. In California,¹¹ more than 200 social scientists worked with the State Central Committee on Social Studies in identifying major concepts in the fields of anthropology, history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, geography, political science, and economics. A State Committee in Wisconsin¹² followed a somewhat similar procedure in preparing a list of basic concepts and ideas drawn from each of the social science disciplines.

The concept-development approach to organizing social studies instruction attempts to find ways of subsuming large quantities of factual material under a relatively small number of generalizations. This procedure will, it is hoped, drastically

¹⁰ Harold Guetzkow, Ed. *Simulation in International Relations: Developments in Teaching and Research*, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.

¹¹ *Report of the State Central Committee on Social Studies to the California State Curriculum Commission*. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1961. 92 pp.

¹² *A Conceptual Framework for the Social Studies in Wisconsin Schools*, Social Studies Bulletin No. 4, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Madison, Wisconsin, 1964.

reduce the number of isolated facts to be remembered and center attention on guiding principles which students master by selecting and organizing the supporting factual evidence. It is not intended that basic concepts be taught as items to be memorized, but rather as analytical generalizations in illuminating ideas which will emerge from what has been studied.

Shirley Engle¹³ has proposed that "the progressive mastery of a relatively small number of basic ideas . . . should be the continuous purpose of social studies instruction at every grade level and in every subject. Engle's list of basic ideas includes:

- a. The concept of culture, including the way in which a culture is preserved and/or changed.
- b. The concept of man in a culture interacting with the forces of nature, including both man's dependence on nature and his increasing control over nature.
- c. The concept of social group, including the relation of the group to the development of the individual.
- d. The concept of economic organization, including: the relations of economic organization to human goals and to developing technology; division of labor and corporate production; growth through economic planning, capital saving, and investment.
- e. The concept of political organization, including the nature of political rights and responsibilities and means of political control.
- f. The concept of freedom in relation to personal security and social control.
- g. The concept of growing interdependence between individuals and groups.
- h. The concept of science and the scientific approach to knowing.
- i. The concept of the superrational, including religion, aesthetics, and philosophy.

In this view, each basic concept is the center of a cluster of related facts, ideas, or generalizations which help clarify and explain human experience. Such a list might serve as an over-all structure of the curriculum by providing the unifying principles for each particular subject.

New methods and techniques are more than pedagogical devices to motivate and involve students. The spirit and process of

inquiry, the emphasis on analysis and critical thinking, and the value of objectivity—these are not gimmicks; nor are they temporary expedients to stem the flood of the information. They are designed to liberate the spirit, to sharpen the mind, to preserve in the adult the curiosity, the questioning, the desire to learn which he had as a child.

Natural scientists are committed to seek the truth wherever their inquiries might lead. Are social studies educators ready, willing, and able to accept this commitment? Are we prepared to live with the long-range results these methods will surely produce? The term "critical thinking" is tidy and respectable when printed in a curriculum guide. Does it look as tidy or respectable when manifested in student demonstrations on a university campus? Are social studies educators ready to accept the task of examining and appraising the causes and the consequences of given value-systems, in a way that the price of maintaining these value-systems can be responsibly assessed? How much change are teachers and administrators willing to promote and to live with?

Guidelines and Purposes

It seems axiomatic that we cannot improve our programs without being clear about what we seek to accomplish. Progress cannot be made when the journey is without direction. In the past, curriculum improvement efforts often consisted primarily of outlining the subjects and topics to be covered at each grade level. Today, this is generally recognized as nearly a useless exercise. Of far more importance is a set of criteria for determining what to teach.

Several publications of the National Council for the Social Studies are helpful in suggesting what the goals of the social studies should be. *Social Studies in Transition: Guidelines for Change*,¹⁴ contains a

¹³ Shirley Engle, "Thoughts in Regard to Revision," *Social Education*, 27: 182, April, 1963.

¹⁴ *Social Studies in Transition: Guidelines for Change*, Dorothy McClure Fraser and Samuel P. McCutchen, Editors. Number 12, 1965. pp. 6-9.

wealth of information relating to basic considerations in revising the curriculum. In a section entitled, "Criteria for an Adequate Social Studies Program," social studies educators are urged to "respond to the needs of American Society in the 20th century, . . . take account of the findings of scholarship in the social and behavioral sciences, and reflect and apply established knowledge of the teaching and learning process."

In spelling out the implications of these stipulations, the publication states that an adequate social studies curriculum must:

- 1) Identify and emphasize the values and ideals that have guided the American people and nation, with a view to ensuring a reasoned and disciplined patriotism.
- 2) Be global in scope, encompassing an understanding and appreciation not only of Western civilization and people to whom our past is bound, but of cultures and peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America with whom our relations are increasingly close. A study of the similarities and diversities of cultures and the different stages of political development and economic growth are required.
- 3) Provide realism and vitality in the study of American and world society and problems, by deliberately including attention to issues that are unsolved, perhaps decisive, but that require development of informed opinion.
- 4) Provide continuing opportunity for development and continuing applications of skills in critical thinking.
- 5) Take account of new knowledge and new interpretations in such long-established disciplines as history, geography, political science, and economics and of the findings of the newer behavioral sciences (anthropology, sociology, psychology), and of interdisciplinary (area) studies.
- 6) In developing courses and units there must be rigorous selection with a focus on the understanding of contemporary society and the skills needed in achieving understanding.
- 7) Take account of the maturity levels of learning, which advance from year to year but also vary widely within each age group.
- 8) Both adapt to and capitalize on the different learning styles and the varied abilities and talents, skills, interests, and backgrounds of learners by drawing upon a wide range of learning experiences, materials, and media, as appropriate.
- 9) Ensure continuity and consistency, through the years of elementary and secondary school, reconciling the necessity for intelligent choice

among many possible courses and units with the obligation to realize and to reinforce systematically the gains from choices actually made.

- 10) Recognize that learning does not cease with termination of school attendance, and provide the stimulus, skills, and knowledge of sources that are needed if individuals are to continue to learn independently.
- 11) Provide for flexibility and for carefully planned and evaluated experimentation.

Although the academic atmosphere is still clouded with conflicting principles and theories of social studies education, the guidelines offered by the NCSS are widely accepted as general aims. Curriculum workers will find it worth their while to review these guidelines.

The Social Studies Teacher

Few would deny that the most crucial element in an educational program is the school staff. Increasing demands are being made on teachers of the social studies. Among the many things expected of today's teachers are: 1) an understanding of contemporary affairs; 2) familiarity with non-Western cultures; 3) mastery of new interpretations of history and new developments in the social sciences; 4) an appreciation of the values underlying our democratic heritage and an understanding of the Communist and other systems opposed to our way of life; 5) the ability to teach in such a way that students will develop skill in analysis and critical thinking; 6) an ability to help students develop a commitment to American democracy.

In addition, the new curriculum projects are suggesting significant changes in teaching strategy. Among these changes are the shifts in emphasis from a group to the individual; memory to inquiry; reluctance to zest for learning; teacher as a general practitioner to teacher as a clinical specialist; teaching as telling to teaching as guiding; and teaching schedule of 30 hours per week in classroom with children to teaching involving more research planning and development activities. The teacher is no longer seen as a mere communicator of knowledge, but rather as a

model and a guide, a symbol of the educational process, and a person using a wide variety of devices and techniques, who expands and clarifies human experience and gives it personal significance.

In-Service Education

The development of an adequate social studies program rests in part on devising some means to encourage social studies teachers to capitalize on the current ferment in the social studies. A serious problem in curriculum reform is that of transplanting experimental programs from the protected environment of trial classrooms into the more typical classrooms where innovation must be carried on by regular teachers, usually without special help.

Obviously a systematic effort is needed to prepare teachers to use experimental methods, approaches and materials in the classroom. In fact, in a period of prolonged innovation such as we face at present the quality of the social studies program in a particular school may well depend largely upon the effectiveness of its in-service efforts. The following propositions are presented for consideration in developing such in-service efforts:

1. The main source of rigidity in present social studies programs is seldom the published guide or the textbook. It is the teacher who knows little about the subject beyond that contained in the guide or text. He is restricted largely because everything outside these materials is unknown territory. Communication of knowledge depends to a large extent on one's mastery of the knowledge to be communicated. Mere accumulation of information about new areas in social studies, however, will not solve the problem. The re-examination of what the teacher already knows or the development of a perspective or a framework of basic ideas in each discipline or area involves much more than the mere accumulation of information. In other words, in addition to more knowledge, the teacher needs to be furnished with ways of using knowledge to structure and interpret experience.

2. New programs must be demonstrated and observed in action in order to have an impact on teachers. Brickel¹⁵ has concluded that visiting a successful program and observing it in action constitute the most persuasive experience a teacher can have.

¹⁵ Henry M. Brickel, *Organizing New York State for Educational Change*, Albany, New York: State Education Department, 1961, 106 pp.

3. The best way to insure the success of a new program is to provide teachers with all the help they need in moving into the new approach. Among the kinds of help which might be provided are: a) the encouragement and recognition from the school administration; b) opportunities to learn the new context and techniques, including training in specialized methods or courses taught by scholars in the areas to be covered; c) guided practice in the classroom with the expert on hand or on tap; d) providing an abundance of instructional materials; and opportunities to exchange ideas with other teachers who are trying the new approach.

4. Outside attention helps make change stimulating and it may increase the teacher's determination to succeed. The attention of outside visitors or consultants when contrasted with the usual isolation of classroom teachers can be exhilarating. Administrators and supervisors may also find that simply paying attention to what teachers are doing may improve their teaching.

5. Capitalize on opportunities provided by NDEA and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act not only by encouraging teachers to attend summer institutes and acquiring instructional materials and consultant services, but also in setting up local in-service programs.

The various elements of curriculum development considered here are important in determining what to teach and how to teach, but they neither prescribe any single system of methods or techniques nor spell out a pattern for grade placement of content. Numerous patterns have been proposed in the last few years. The NCSS publication *Social Studies in Transition: Guidelines for Change*¹⁶ presents, in some detail, four suggested programs, each offered by an individual who has devoted much study to the question of what should be taught and when. Each recognizes that other patterns of grade placement could be equally effective. Adopting another school's pattern is probably already too common a practice. Nonetheless, local curriculum planners may find helpful suggestions in this NCSS bulletin.

Summary

Curriculum review is a continuing process. There is no such thing as a finished curriculum. Among the basic considera-

¹⁶ *Social Studies in Transition*, op. cit.

tions which influence the development of a curriculum in the social studies are: 1) the talent, abilities, training, and experience of the teachers and administrative staff; 2) the abilities and background of the students; 3) present offerings and commitments in social studies; 4) state and local requirements; 5) knowledge of learning theory and research in the social sciences; 6) availability of consultants, instructional materials, and community resources; and 7) the amount of time available for social studies instruction.

Developing an adequate social studies program in the midst of the mid-century revolution in education requires those responsible for such programs to:

1. Discuss, clarify, and redefine the goals and purposes of the curriculum;
2. Prepare and adopt a list of instructional objectives against which the impact of courses on the student can be judged;
3. Provide a continuous in-service training for all teachers, including opportunities for teachers to visit schools involved in experimentation and bringing consultants into the school;
4. Establish a working relationship between university scholars and the teachers in the schools;
5. Devise efficient means of identifying, acquiring and utilizing a wide variety of instructional materials, methods, and technology;
6. Undertake experiments to determine which of the new curricula, projects, proposals, and recommendations are most appropriate in the local schools;
7. Develop local criteria to be employed

in making judgments about available programs;

8. Provide information about, explain, and interpret curriculum trends in the social studies. Some one or group in the school needs to keep in close touch with the multiplicity of special projects in social studies.

At present there is no proved or widely accepted comprehensive design which might serve as a model for local systems in building a new social studies program. Nonetheless, every school can benefit from the countless opportunities to prune, trim, up-date, and improve its offerings. Grand-scale efforts to revise or to launch broad-scale reforms seldom succeed. Efforts to improve the social studies at the local level are more likely to succeed if they are carefully pinpointed to deal with but a segment or a few interrelated aspects of the program. Organizing to make effective use of all talent and resources now available and establishing contact with selected university scholars and with experimental projects will surely help create a climate for needed changes. The profusion of national, state, and district-wide programs offer local groups many opportunities to help initiate, develop, and implement a great variety of experimental projects.

Our pluralistic system of education provides many opportunities for individual educators and local school groups to participate in the current revolution in American education. The continuing challenge is—are there enough who will use these opportunities with intelligence, integrity, and care?