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AUTHOR Shaver, James P.
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ABSTRACT

This paper defines, inquires into the relationships, and analyzes the terms social sciences and social studies. Too often social studies are a simplified instructional adaptation from the social sciences in which curricular decisions are made on the basis of dictates of the social science disciplines and of college prerequisites. A social studies course must have a different rationale than a social science course and should not be confused with social sciences or vice-versa. Rather, secondary social studies should offer a general education relevant to all students and prepare them for effective citizenship responsibility and participation. Elective social science courses can meet special college preparation needs. In contrast to the present erroneous emphasis on structure in the social sciences, the evidence indicates that learning improves when concepts and data reflect relevant societal problems. In conclusion, despite the belief that social sciences alone are inadequate as a source of concepts for a curriculum because intellectual styles of the social scientist are not generally appropriate to the analysis of problems faced by the adult citizen, the probability of continued emphasis on the social sciences is forecast. (Author/SJM)

WHERETO, THE SOCIAL STUDIES: SOCIAL STUDIES OR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?*

James P. Shaver
Utah State University

Much controversy in social studies education is due to the ambiguity in the words we use to discuss the curriculum. So, I would like to begin today by defining some terms. As this conference is focused on the social studies, that is the first term that needs to be clarified. It has become traditional to define social studies by contrasting it with the social sciences. And a common definition of the social sciences is that they are the scholarly, academic areas of study of man in his society. (If we expand this definition to say "the study of man in his environment," geography is more easily included--and so are most of the life sciences, including, e.g., zoology.) With this definition, history is properly classified as a social science. I would like to avoid controversy right now over whether history does not basically belong with the humanities as a form of literary expression. I do want to emphasize history's proper place with the scholarly disciplines concerned with the study of man in society.

Traditionally, the next step in this definitional process has been to define social studies as the pedagogical application of the social sciences, that is, as the social sciences simplified and adapted for instructional purposes. Wesley first suggested this popular definition, I believe in the early 1940's, and he and Wronski have perpetuated it in their text on Teaching Social Studies in High Schools. In so doing, they have influenced thinking about the social studies curriculum, and have performed a

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major disservice to the field. For this definition, by providing a ready-made content--i.e., whatever social scientists, especially historians, choose to study--has detracted our thinking from the major and the first task of curriculum development--that of establishing a rationale for the curriculum. Without a carefully reasoned justification for curricular decisions, we find that the social studies in our secondary schools are uneasily wed to the social sciences, especially history, but with a pitiful lack of clear direction--except, of course, in those schools where the clear mandate is to prepare students for college. (And in those schools, pity the poor student who is not college-bound!) This lack of direction is the reason that the question, Whereto, the social studies? is so poignant and pregnant!

I would like to offer an alternative definition for <u>social studies</u>. It is one which gives the social studies distinctiveness in purpose that it has lacked. It also brings to the fore a commonly stated objective; the explicit formulation of and instruction for this objective has been frequently and vociferously resisted by people within and without the teaching profession.

To begin with, I would like to suggest that instruction in the social studies has primarily a general education function; that is, curricular decisions in the social studies should be based on educational criteria relevant to <u>all</u> students in a school, not just those who are college-bound. And, further, that the purpose of general education in social studies should be to prepare students for more reflective and effective citizenship in their society--a society which is predicated on the notion that individuals have contributions to make to societal decision-making and that the schools should foster the ability to do so.

Accepting this way of construing the social studies has some obvious implications: First, curricular decisions will not be made on the basis of the dictates of the social science disciplines, nor on the basis of college prerequisites. A social studies course is not a social science course by this definition and must answer to a different type of justification. It is not enough to say that "this is the way an academician thinks his discipline should be structured; these are the concepts he deems important and the order in which he thinks they should be taught." The question must be, how does this content or this mode of instruction contribute to preparing the student for his adult citizenship role in this society? (Obviously, this is where the teacher or curriculum builder's rationale is crucial. What are his views of the society, the citizen appropriate to the society, and the content and instructional methods that might best help attain that type of individual?)

The implementation of this suggested definition of social studies should not disturb people. There is little or no evidence that "general education" predicated on the notion that exposure to the academic disciplines will create well-rounded, reflective citizens has been successful. In fact, there is no evidence that students learn concepts better if taught as structures. It is highly likely that the social scientist has too easily projected his own excitement and pleasure at creating structure into his expectations for students, especially when these students are restless and non-intellectually inclined, if not anti-intellectual, adolescents, as if often the case. Needless to say, there is quite a psychological difference between creating structure and learning the structure as created by someone else. A grim witness to this difference

is the amount of obtuse reasoning being used to call the teaching in many of the new social science curricula the discovery method, when the student is not free to discover, but must rediscover what someone else has predetermined.

(I would like to avoid for now the basic problem of how to agree on what structure of concepts is appropriate in any particular discipline--for example, in economics, an area where I have been involved in directing curriculum work. Social scientists cannot come to agreement among themselves on the essential concepts or the appropriate ordering and emphasis of concepts in their respective fields; nor do they agree on the possibility of a structure encompassing all the social sciences. This lack of unanimity, while the essence of the academic pursuit raises perplexing questions about which structure will be used to teach any particular discipline. Is any structure appropriate as long as it has been carefully reasoned out by a recognized scholar? It is doubtful that many social scientists or social studies educators would accept that proposition. But questions about "which structure" areirrevelant once we reject the social sciences as the dictators of the social studies curriculum.)

The point is that the emphasis on structure has been based on assumptions about learning that seem to be erroneous. It is difficult to avoid the import of Dewey's dictum, said by others before and echoed by many since, that we learn concepts and data as we use them in reflecting about problems important to us. Why not teach social science concepts in the context of understanding and reflecting about the crucial problems facing our society? This emphasis has the advantage of focusing attention on the syntactical, process concepts of science (the means of verifying claims

about reality) as well as on the substantive concepts (those used for describing and interpreting reality) which have traditionally been taught. Social science curriculum projects (with the exception of a couple in history such as that discussed by Dick Brown today and the one directed by Ted Fenton at Carnegie Tech) have ignored the former, that is, the proof process concepts. And, even in the case of Brown and Fenton the emphasis seems to have been, perhaps unfortunately, on teaching students to think "like historians," not on applying the historian's conceptual tools for more adequate comprehension of societal problems.

Another assumption seemingly underlying much of the social science curriculum work is likely to debilitate the effectiveness of the materials. That is, the assumption that the student comes to the classroom a tabula rasa upon which the structure of the discipline (i.e., its ordered concepts) are to be etched for future use. We know, however, that the student comes to us with a ready-made social theory, one perhaps not as complex, well-organized, nor well-founded empirically as that of the social scientist; but, nevertheless, one that serves the student moderately well in construing and ordering his social world. The instructional task is to help the student explore and go beyond his present conceptions. Curricular success is more likely if the new concepts are related to the student's present frame of reference, rather than based on the integrity of the ordering of concepts as judged by academicians. To ignore the student's existing frame of reference, except as his interests and background can be utilized as incidental motivation for communicating structure, is at best a dubious, haphazard, and possibly disastrous, approach to curriculum building. Once the existance and, to a considerable extent, the validity

of the student's frame of reference prior to instruction is accepted, it must be conceded that the result of instruction cannot be a replication in the student's mind of the social scientists' model. The outcome will be an intellectual framework that is largely idiosyncratic to the student, to the extent that he has even taken on the concepts as part of his working set of conceptual tools. This he is more likely to do if he has been guided in their application in the context of critical problems. Incidentally, I think educators have sold our youth short, as events are now proving, in terms of their desire and ability to become concerned about societal issues. We have found in our curriculum work[1] that young people will get intensely involved in the consideration of societal issues, such as those raised by race relations--and what better time for initial involvement in such matters, before the problems of vocation and marriage become dominant. Why do we wonder that people do not make a miraculous metamorphosis to active political participation at age 21?

If it seems that I'm proposing that social science courses be eliminated from the schools below the college level, I really am not. But I do contend that they should not be called social studies courses and confused with general education. Elective social science courses should be taught--for the intellectually alert and curious student. (I have an eight-year-old son who is already an history addict, partly, I suspect, because of the number of history books he finds around home. It does disturb his mother somewhat that he comes home from the library with books on subjects such as the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the Civil War,

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[1]See, e.g., Donald W. Oliver and James P. Shaver, Teaching Public Issues in the High School. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.

instead of with the more traditional third-grade story books. I mention this only to underline that I am not anti-history. I find it a fascinating subject, but my own enjoyment of studying history is not ample justification for imposing that study on all students. This is a point I am afraid social studies teachers have often overlooked, and then recoiled in horror at the lack of so-called "intellectual curiosity" on the part of their students.) Elective courses should be taught, then, for the curious, and also social science courses, such as Advanced Placement History, should be taught, as well as possible, for college-bound students. The intent should not be confused with that of the general education program, however, nor should such courses be substitutes for the social studies program.

You may ask whether my proposed orientation for the social studies is not likely to produce students ignorant of our country's past and lacking in the social science concepts that may be fruitfully applied to the analysis of the issues facing our society? Quite to the contrary! There is research evidence to bear out Dewey's contention. It is likely that the results of focusing on citizenship education in the sense of developing intellectual competencies for dealing with public controversy are likely to be increased ability to think about issues and just as much and often more learning of conventional social science and history knowledge.[2] Considerable economics can be affected by focusing on societal controversy and the conceptual tools and information to handle controversy. In fact, we have found that up to two-thirds of a traditional two-year U.S. history sequence can be taken up by a problems analysis approach

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[2] Ibid.

(including concern with the historical background of problems) without (and this is amazing, I believe, in terms of the common claims about the necessity of preserving time to teach students "necessary" background knowledge in the "urn" tradition of education) any negative effects on the learning of history and social science knowledge as compared to students in the regular curriculum, but with considerable gains in analytic ability. Incidentally, the old curriculum also often seemed trite and boring to these students as they went on through school.

It should be obvious, then, that concentrating social studies instruction on the type of general education I have proposed in my definition does not mean the neglect of the social sciences and history. It means their utilization in a framework that indicates to the student the full value of the concepts that academicians have to offer.

But are the social sciences alone sufficient as a source of concepts for such a curriculum? To answer that question we must first of all recognize that there is reasonable doubt whether the intellectual styles of the social scientist and historian are directly appropriate to the analysis of problems faced by the adult citizen. Much social science vocabulary, especially from economics, is becoming a part of common parlance. However, social scientists and historians have not made such clear and compelling contributions to the clarification and resolution of public issues as to suggest that their modes of thought should be adopted as the model for the social studies in the general education sense I am proposing. In fact, the narrowness of the scholar's frame may block as well as facilitate the adequate perception of societal issues.

To what extent is Henry Adams' analysis of the utility of the academic mind in meeting the society's crucial problems still appropriate? He notes in The Education of Henry Adams:

> The lecture room was futile enough, but the faculty room was worse. American society feared total wreck in the maelstrom of political and corporate administration, but it could not look for help to college dons. Adams knew, in that capacity, both Congressmen and professors, and he preferred Congressmen.[3]

Specifically, what about the scientific frame of reference as a basis for general education? The social scientist and historian are concerned with empirical descriptions of reality. At the same time, ethical choices are at the root of much public controversy: What principles shall guide individual or institutional action? Shall we emphasize equality of opportunity and pass fair housing laws; or shall we stress freedom--especially property rights--and leave the determination of who shall buy or rent up to the individual property owner? Despite misguided attempts to teach students that answering factual questions will solve all controversy, and despite the importance of resolving factual disputes in settling debates over public policy, the fact remains that determining what principles should guide policy demands a different set of intellectual skills than does settling factual questions. As Beard pointed out in his book, The Nature of the Social Sciences:

> Now we come to the second question raised by tensions and changes in society: What choices should be made in contingencies? Here the social sciences, working as descriptive sciences with existing and becoming reality, face, unequivocally, ideas of value and choice--argumentative systems of social philosophy based upon conceptions of desirable changes in the social order.

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[3]Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams. New York: Random House, 1931, p. 307.

> At this occurrence empiricism breaks down absolutely. It is impossible to discover by the fact-finding operation whether this or that change is desirable. Empiricism may disclose within limits, whether a proposed change is possible, or to what extent it is possible, and the realities that condition its eventuation, but, given possibility or a degree of possibility, empiricism has no way of evaluating a value without positing value or setting up a frame of value.[4]

The social studies must, then, draw on sources of concepts other than the social sciences and history. The old definition propounded by Wesley and based on a set social science-social studies relationship has too long obscured our vision both in terms of the formulation of a rationale for the social studies and in terms of the proper sources of content for the social studies.

I hope that my remarks to this point have made clear what I would like to see happen in the social studies. I would like to see curriculum development and instruction proceed on the basis of a viable conception of the social studies, not as the little step-sister of the social sciences, but as an area of general education with an integrity of its own--based on its direct confrontation with the most vital concern of a democratic society, the education of individuals who can intelligently perceive and reflect upon the critical issues facing the society. This will entail departure from the notion that the academician's view of his area should determine the social studies curriculum, and from the view that the social sciences and history are the only relevant sources of substantive and thought-process concepts for social studies instruction.

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[4]Charles Beard, The Nature of the Social Sciences. New York: Scribner, 1934, pp. 171-172.

I am not optimistic, however, that this notion will prevail. I am fearful that social studies courses will continue to be dominated by the same influences as in the past; that new and better ways of teaching social science and history content will be developed, but that the non-academically inclined student will continue to feel profound frustration at the irrelevancy to his own life and to his society of much of what passes for social studies, and that the academically inclined student will still be left to recognize on his own the germaneness of what he studies to the contributions he could make to his society.

Of all the nationally sponsored curriculum projects, only two or three are likely to produce rationale and materials appropriate to the view of the social studies I am advocating. Even more important, the classroom teachers, who are the most important link in the curricular decision-making process because they determine, whether consciously or not, what goes on in the individual classroom, often get personal satisfaction from forcing their own interests in social science and history on their students, have been inculcated with the old social science-based definition of the social studies, as well as indoctrinated with notions of the university professor's superiority and imbued with feelings of inferiority vis a vis the so-called academicians (as opposed to those people derisively labeled, educationists, who have themselves often, apparently out of feelings of inferiority, become subservient in their thinking to the scholar in social science or history). Moreover, with textbooks such as they are with their superficial generalities about history and social science, oriented toward the old curriculum pattern and still the dominant form of classroom material, the teacher who wishes

to switch will have to fight. The lack of adequate materials to teach analytic concepts (the American problems and civics texts are shameful in this regard[5]) and to teach the background of important issues, mean that effort at material finding, development, and organization must be great.

It will require tremendous feats of self-insight, intellectual courage, and hard work for teachers to break loose from the conceptions of ties to the social sciences that have fettered social studies to this point. In the present intellectual climate of emphasis on intellectual excellence--commonly interpreted to mean emphasis on academics--the question, "Whereto, the social studies: social studies or the social sciences?" seems foredoomed to the answer, more emphasis on the social sciences.

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[5]See, e.g., James P. Shaver, "Reflective Thinking, Values, and Social Studies Textbooks." School Review, 1965, 73, pp. 226-257.