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ABSTRACT

The content and components that can be included in the social studies curriculum are dependent upon how the discipline is defined. If social studies is not simply an offshoot of social sciences, but, rather a required general education program concerned with the preparation of citizens for reflective participation in a democratic society and with educational relevance, the curriculum can properly focus on public issues. Such a curriculum needs to be based on a realistic view of societal values and their relation to public controversy. The school can become a socializing force in American society depending upon how the society's basic values are handled in the classroom. Cohesiveness in society is dependent upon the sharing of a common frame of values. First, children need to be involved emotionally in commitment to basic American values, then helped to develop a rational basis for their values by giving additional meaning to the already existing values through considering consequences of value commitment, contradiction among values, and conflict and the pluralistic nature of society. This curriculum can be taught effectively within a school only if discrepancies between avowed values and the actual state of society are recognized and exposed, and only if pluralistic and political commitment, interchange, and involvement with society are modeled. (SJM)

CONSIDERATIONS UNDERLYING A PUBLIC ISSUES ORIENTED SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

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> All education has ... an eminently political function without which it becomes either technical or idle play. Education for education's sake is, like art for art's sake, the escapist slogan of a leisure class which has lost a sense of its dependence upon the political order for its survival. (Carl Joachim Friedrich in Man and His Government. McGraw-Hill, 1963, pp. 617-18.)

In thinking about the social studies curriculum for inner city schools, perhaps nothing is as important as to recognize that the inner city is in crisis and that, for the most part, solutions to the city's problems will be political ones. That is, whether the problems faced by those who live in and govern the inner city are social or economic, it is primarily through the political structure of the society that solutions are being sought and will be found.

In that context, it behooves us to reflect on some basic elements in the frames of reference from which we consider curricular relevance in the inner city school. These elements include our conceptions of the social studies--what can properly be included in the social studies curriculum, of the nature of our society, and of the place of values in the curriculum. I want to attempt to explicate my views on each of these points in order to indicate some of the considerations underlying the proposal that the social studies curriculum for inner city students be public issues oriented.

The Social Studies: A Definition

To begin with, the meanings which we attach to the words we use have a significant effect on our behavior. If you were a plumber, you would be surprised to have someone call you to install electrical wiring in a new house. That is not part of the defined competence of plumbers. By the same token, our reactions as social studies educators to requests to perform certain tasks are shaped by the definition which we accept for the area encompassed by "social studies". Unfortunately, social studies educators commonly have not distinguished between social studies education and social science education or, put another way, they have defined social studies in reference to the social sciences. The social sciences are defined as those academic fields of investigation concerned with man in his social setting, and the social studies are frequently then defined as the social sciences adapted and simplified for pedagogical purposes.

Note that this sequence of definition assumes that curriculum selection and development depends upon the delineation of subject matter by the social scientist. This becomes of particular importance if we recall that the scientific commitment is to the adequate description of reality; social science education must, then, be judged on the adequacy with which scientific knowledge, and perhaps the methods by which that knowledge is accumulated, are communicated to the student. But are these criteria appropriate for judging social studies instruction, given the long standing commitment to citizenship education on the part of social studies educators?[1]

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[1]See, for example: The Committee of Seven, The Study of History in the Schools: Report to the American Historical Association. New York: Macmillan, 1899; Arthur W. Dunn, The Social Studies in Secondary Education. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 28, 1916;

Educators who accept the social sciences as the reference point for defining social studies education are not likely to be receptive to the suggestion that the curriculum should be focused on public issues. Also, I would maintain, they are likely to do a great deal of teaching that is not directly relevant to citizenship education.

Rather than starting with subject matter, an adequate definition of social studies should begin with the recognition that social studies education is general education. Social studies courses are required courses; they make up a program required of all students. Such a program should be based on a rationale that takes into account the potential societal needs for all students, not just those going on to college or those who happen to be interested in abstract descriptions of the society and its past. When a society committed to human dignity assumes that all citizens have contributions to make to the selection of leaders and the determination of public policies and that the schools, and the social studies program in particular, should foster the ability to participate readily and rationally, it does not seem out of line to suggest that social studies should not be viewed as simply an offshoot of the social sciences, but defined as that part of the school's general education program concerned with the preparation of citizens for reflective and effective participation in a democratic society.

Charles Beard, A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools (Report of the Committee on the Social Studies of the American Historical Association, Part 1). New York: Scribner, 1934; National Council for the Social Studies Committee on Concepts and Values, A Guide to Content in the Social Studies. Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1957; James P. Shaver, "Social Studies: The Need for Redefinition", Social Education, 1967, 31, pp. 588-596.

Given this definition, it is clear that content must be selected in regard to factors other than the interests and desires of academicians in the social sciences and history. The pertinent question for the social studies educator becomes, "What are the prerequisites of intelligent political participation?", rather than, "What do social scientists and historians consider to be the legitimate domains and structures of knowledge?"

Let me make one point clear, however. This is not an anti-social science or anti-history position. For it is obvious, to me at least, that to comprehend society adequately for intelligent participation, one must have a great deal of social science and historical knowledge. However, the definition I propose opens the way to the selection, organization, and presentation of knowledge on bases other than the way the academician views his field.

There are research findings as well as daily life experiences that suggest that John Dewey and many other educators have been correct in maintaining that we learn that which we are able to use in construing and grappling with problems of real consequence to us as individuals. Surely if we are committed to having our students learn to deal rationally with the problems confronting the society, there is no better context than the consideration of those problems within which to teach the relevant social science and historical knowledge. This is a basic assumption underlying my proposal that the consideration of public issues be the focal point for the social studies curriculum. Experience in working with students,[2] as well as a look at youth's contemporary demands for involvement, indicates that the society's

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

problems are real to young people. Focusing on those problems can provide the relevance which has been so sadly lacking for so many social studies programs. In the inner city, where the problems of racial strain, of economic survival are evident, the call to involve students in the consideration of public issues seems so obvious, both on grounds of interest and citizenship preparation, that I hesitate to belabor the point.

Values and the Nature of Society

Simply saying that we are going to focus on public issues is not in and of itself going to make the curriculum realistic or relevant to inner city youth. A public issues oriented social studies curriculum must be based on a realistic view of values and their relation to public controversy, and this inevitably involves some consideration of the nature of our society. I would like to touch on these matters next.

Let me begin by noting that we must recognize explicitly that we cannot avoid values in the classroom. The choice is not whether to deal with values, but to make conscious, explicit decisions about how to handle value questions or to deal with them haphazardly and without clear purpose. Take, for example, the topic of slavery which is commonly touched on in American history courses. A social studies teacher might, as part of a systematic attempt to involve students in the examination of values and moral issues, raise questions about the morality of slave trade and ownership. Or, at the other extreme, the teacher might "avoid" the moral question and just teach "objective" history--that is, that slavery did exist, its extent, and the economic factors that helped to perpetuate the institution.

Has the latter teacher avoided the moral issue and avoided teaching about values? Certainly not! The teacher is teaching something about

values (and given the present state of our country's racial sores, especially in the inner city, and the fact that the inner city teacher is likely to have heavily, if not predominantly, negro classes, the teacher may also be revealing to his students much of his own value position). If we can assume that the school does have an impact on the students' attitudes toward such matters (and we return to this dubious assumption shortly), then such a teacher is teaching that the proper posture is disengagement from the major moral crises facing mankind in our society. If the teacher is consistent in ignoring the ethical questions raised by matters such as the current treatment of negroes in our society, the unequal economic conditions of large numbers of inner city and rural dwellers, drafting young men to fight in Vietnam, or, historically again, the Nazis' final solution to the "Jewish problem", the implication is obvious.

What, then, is a legitimate role for the school vis a vis values? The school is--or could be--a basic socializing force in American society. Educators, especially those concerned with secondary school education, like to think that the school's basic task is intellectual--the building of knowledge and of thinking skills. This may be true, but a role in regard to values is not denied by that assertion. The school's explicit attempts at socialization are often aimed at teaching students to get along with one another (to cooperate), to want to do well, or at least to be quiet in class and in the library so that they won't disturb other students who are conforming. These attempts, however, reflect a superficial view of the socialization process. We need instead to look at socialization in terms of the dynamics and the basic values of the society.

First, it is important to recognize that the cohesiveness of our society--and it is there, despite the strains being exerted by dissention over the Vietnam war and the denial to negroes of their proper place in society--is dependent upon the sharing of a common frame of basic values, what Myrdal[3] has referred to as the "American creed". Commitment to these basic values provides the basis for the legitimacy and authority of societal policy decisions as reflected and executed by our governmental agencies. This commitment also provides the context for the discussion so important to the democratic consent process.

It is next to impossible for people to carry on rational discourse about matters of importance if they do not share a frame of commitments. Take, for example, the recent protests by Dr. Benjamin Spock and others against drafting young men for the Vietnam war. Even those who disagree with the protests know (not just in the intellectual senses, but somehow in the depth of their brains or guts) that freedom of speech is important and worth defending; and those who agree with the protests and resent the prosecution and conviction of Dr. Spock know in the same way that obedience to law is important. With these common convictions, the disputants can debate whether Dr. Spock should have behaved as he did and whether he should be punished; without common commitments, debate over the ethical questions raised by the protests is meaningless. This need for commonality in frames of reference in order to debate reasonable solutions is becoming of increasing importance as segments of the negro community at least claim to reject values which they see as imposed by a white society.

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[3]Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944.

Note that I have been using the words commitment and basic values. These terms need to be explicated as part of the considerations underlying a public issues oriented curriculum. The word commitment suggests a nonrational, non-intellectual element to our values. The emotional basis for our values is obvious; we learn values as emotive feelings. And, the school must not shrink (as educators have done, at least outwardly) from that part of the citizenship education role which calls for inculcating and reinforcing the emotive elements of value commitment, for, as already noted, this is the basis of the societal cohesion and survival without which political process has no meaning. As Friedrich has pointed out, both formal and informal education are of the greatest importance in maintaining a society:

> By supporting the values and beliefs prevalent in a community, education provides the underpinning for an authority and legitimacy which ... depend upon these values and beliefs. For it is in their terms that the reasoned elaboration of authoritative communication has to be cast, and the title to rule has to be argued. (Man and His Government. McGraw-Hill, 1963).

We must be willing, especially at the elementary school level, to aim our curricula at developing and reinforcing commitment to the basic American values through the use of such materials as the heroic narrative--including, for negro students, the heroic place of the negro in our society, past and present.[4]

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[4]See Donald W. Oliver, "Educating Citizens for Responsible Individualism, 1960-1980", in Franklin Patterson (editor), Citizenship and a Free Society: Education for the Future. 30th yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, D. C., 1960.

Commitment is, then, an important consideration. What about the emphasis upon basic values? By basic values I refer to the general values of our society which people generally take to be morally applicable to all men. These include such articles of the American faith as freedom of speech, equality before the law, due process of law, freedom of religious belief. It is a commitment to these that we have a mandate to inculcate or reinforce. Great deliberation and care are demanded--for the mandate must not be interpreted as a call to inculcate one's personal interpretations of the values or even the interpretations of a particular subgroup in the society. It is one thing, for example, to teach that freedom of speech is an important commitment of a democratic society, but quite another to teach that freedom of speech means that one has a right to carry any sort of sign he wishes (or that one does not have a right to do so). In short, the dictum to teach values must not be used as an excuse for imposing policy decisions, for this imposition short circuits the central assumption underlying citizenship education in this society--that each person has a right to come to his own decisions about the proper aims and policies for the society.

I would not, of course, recommend that the responsibility of the social studies curriculum vis a vis values ends with emotional commitment. Social studies educators are also obligated--if for no other reason than by virtue of the commitment in this society to rationality--to concern themselves with making the basic values rational. That is, we must help students develop a rational basis for their values. If we do not do so, two unfortunate things are likely to occur: (1) The values may be rejected as the student comes into contact with seeming (and real, but unanticipated)

contradictions between the ideal value statements and the operation of the real world; and (2) the values may not function as explicit elements in the individual's attempts to comprehend and deal with public issues.

What is involved in the rationalization of an emotively-learned value framework? The rationalization can surely begin by the late elementary years. One of the first steps is giving values label specificity. For example, the student may have a vague notion that people should be able to speak out on important matters. Labeling this notion "freedom of speech" provides an organizing hook for thought and conversation.

The labeling also provides a basis for the next step which is to build the student's concept of freedom of speech by providing him with instances (perhaps taken from Supreme Court cases) in which people thought freedom of speech had been supported or denied. (Of course, a reasonable pedagogical alternative would be to present the student with the societal examples before providing the label.)

It should be noted here that much of what has been referred to above as "inculcation" or "reinforcement" of values might be more appropriately called "crystallization", because students do come to school with a set of values, many closely related to the basic social value concepts. For example, the notions of "fair play" which students develop early in life are closely akin to our more sophisticated ideas of due process of law and equality of opportunity. Even in the slums of the inner city, the child has some notion of "property rights", if only in regard to a knife or a baseball bat. The teacher's task, then, is usually not to teach a new set of values, but to give additional meaning to the existing sets.

A next step in rationalizing basic values is to involve students in considering the consequences of commitment, or lack of commitment, to the values. This process will help to define what one intends to encompass by the value label as well as help to provide a rational basis for commitment. Questions need to be raised such as: What might happen if people in this society were denied the right to free speech? What would the society be like without law and order? How might the hiring practices of an employer who believes in equality of opportunity differ from those of an employer who does not?

Very likely, considering the consequences of commitment or noncommitment will involve the students in the next step in value rationalization--the consideration of contradictions among our values--unless the teacher, out of a misconception about valuing and the nature of our society, avoids such a confrontation with the heart of decision-making.

A basic consideration underlying and calling for a public issues oriented curriculum is the pluralistic nature of our society.[5] Individual citizens come from a great variety of backgrounds--subcultures within our national culture. Although committed to the same general values, variations in the experiences which have shaped their frames of reference lead to differing interpretations of the basic values, especially as applied to specific situations. In short, consensus in regard to the basic commitments of the society is at a vague, abstract level, and controversy results as different individuals attempt to construe public issues in terms of the abstractions.

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[5]For a more complete discussion, see James P. Shaver, "Americanism as an Educational Objective," The Educational Forum, 1968, 33, pp. 63-69.

Paradoxically, then, the strength of a set of abstract commitments--that they provide a basis for governmental legitimacy as well as a framework for debate among citizens--is also a source of difficulty. Consider, for example, a debate between Barry Goldwater and Franklin D. Roosevelt over proper public policy, perhaps in regard to social security legislation. Neither would deny the importance of freedom or of equality of opportunity. Yet, they would surely disagree over the meaning of these values and over the implications for public policy. These strains are inevitable in a pluralistic society, as the following statement by Harvey Swados, the novelist and social critic, indicates:

> This is not the America of Thoreau, of Emerson, of Emily Dickinson, any more than it is the America of Golden Rule Jones, of John P. Altgeld, of Jane Addams; and I hereby reassert that those of us who persist in saying No to a society built on worship of the buck for the things and people it can buy, those of us who persist in dreaming of a society built on mutual aid and mutual respect, have just as much right to consider ourselves as representative of an essential corpuscular element in the American bloodstream as do the Luces, the Nixons, the Kennedys, and all those who, in appropriating for themselves even the rhetoric of our common dream, have turned it into a nightmare. (A Radical's America, Little Brown, 1962)

Pluralism is not the only source of value conflict, however. The values themselves are contradictory with one another. Myrdal has pointed out in An American Dilemma[6] that our general, basic values often conflict with our evaluations of particular situations. A man who believes that equality of opportunity is good may still believe that he should not have to hire negroes in his plant.

General values also conflict with one another. A classical dilemma has been that between freedom and equality: Increases in one are almost

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[6]Myrdal, Op. cit.

inevitably at the expense of the other. The same public issues, and the proposed solutions to them, can be (and usually are) construed by different people or groups of people in terms of different values, each of which is an important component of the American frame of reference. An open housing bill, for example, can be defended in the name of equality of opportunity and opposed in the name of property rights. And this conflict between values takes place not only between individuals, but within individuals because each of us is committed to an often contradictory set of values.

Awareness of the conflict among values is extremely important if the curriculum is to focus on public issues. We have too often taught that consistency is good in and of itself; that consistency is the most important end. By so doing, we have forced people to deal with inconsistency in irrational ways, including the avoidance of the recognition that most decisions about public issues contradict one or more important American values as well as support others.

Conflict between values is, then, also an important argument for focusing on public issues in the social studies curriculum. For if decisions about issues are to be rational, students need to be assisted in recognizing and weighing conflicting values. This assistance should be given in the context of the critical issues with which we hope the students will deal rationally as future citizens.

The School in Society

I have argued to this point that an explicit recognition of the commitment of social studies educators to citizenship education leads one way from a history-social science oriented curriculum to a public issues

oriented curriculum. Although much of the content might well be the same, the criteria for selection, organization, and presentation will be different. I have also contended that consideration of the pluralistic nature of the society, the reliance upon value commitment for societal cohesion and debate, and the conflict among values as they are applied to the justification of decisions about public issues calls for a focusing on public issues, and suggests some dimensions for a curriculum so focused.

Another major consideration is the school itself as an institution. Perhaps the best way to explore this consideration is to raise the direct question, Can the school do the job? Can a public issues oriented social studies curriculum be adequately taught within our present formal educational institutions? This is, perhaps, an especially pregnant question for inner city educators, for we now see divisive social forces at work in our large cities. The discrepancies between our avowed values and the circumstances of large numbers of people in the cities are at the heart of much of the crisis of the city. And, if the school preaches the values while ignoring the discrepancies, if it ignores the issues and the inherent value conflicts, there is not much hope that the curriculum will have an impact on the crucial decisions of the years ahead.

We must face the fact that generally the school does not provide a model of pluralistic commitment and interchange nor a context for inquiry. The social studies curriculum rarely deals systematically with current, pressing problems. The school is the bulwark of the so-called "middle class" values which allow little tolerance for deviations from commonly accepted standards of behavior. In fact, the school makes a point of imposing standards of dress and grooming with little regard for the values

involved or for the student as a possible input in the decision-making process. There is also an almost total lack of involvement of students in the curricular decision-making process. In short, the school is a system geared to imposing decisions, not to involving students in making decisions. And, school personnel rarely recognize the conflict in basic democratic values inherent in their authoritarian decision-making process.

School people themselves are too often not models of political commitment and involvement. In fact, administrators are often appalled by the thought of a politically active staff. Not being involved in controversy, the teachers classroom pronouncements about the importance of political participation have a piercing ring of hypocrisy. That is why teacher strikes may have some pedagogical value; students may finally learn that teachers do feel strongly enough about something--money, at least--to stand up and be counted.

The reliance on history and social science dominated courses of study is another contributor to the school's unreality and irrelevance. Because of the scientist's orientation, such courses do not confront societal conflict or lead to the consideration of value issues, they too frequently use conceptual structures that are not meaningful to the students, and they provide further evidence to the students that the school is an artificial limb on the body of life.

And, it should be noted here if it is not already strikingly obvious, that courses based on history and the social sciences have another type of unreality that might not be obvious to students, but should be the concern of every social studies educator. If we wish to educate our students to be rational political participants, we need to pay attention to

providing them with models of rationality. These models, to be realistic, must take into account the problems of value conflict recognition and resolution. Except as such problems can be converted into factual questions (such as, what will be the consequences of a particular course of action?), the empirical orientation of the historian and the social scientist, the fact that scientific modes of inquiry are aimed at description and not at the making of ethical choices, means that that orientation will not provide an adequate model of thought.[7] In other words, although the processes of factual proof are invaluable tools in thinking about public issues, they are not alone adequate to the task of weighing values in resolving ethical questions as to the proper aims and actions for the society and its individuals.

Conclusion

The unreality of the school, its lack of relevance to the "real" world, calls for a public issue oriented curriculum. In our social studies classes, we must recognize and deal with the conflicts over the issues facing society, as well as admit the discrepancies between our value ideals and the state of society. We need to examine societal controversy in the light of the society's commitments and the history which led to the present circumstances, including past efforts to eradicate social injustice. And, there must be attention to realistic, operational means for achieving desired ends within the society's framework of values and

[7]See Oliver and Shaver, op. cit. The Utah State University Social Studies Project entitled, "A Secondary School Social Studies Curriculum Focused on the Analysis of Public Issues," funded by the U.S. Office of Education, has been aimed at developing a set of analytic concepts geared to the ethical nature of public issues. The project is directed by James P. Shaver, Bureau of Educational Research, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, 84321.

procedures. That is, the curriculum should deal with effective political organization and action, not just the formal structure of government.

It must be stressed again, however, that the approach must be realistic. If, for example, students raise the possibility of violence as means of affecting desired ends, the teacher, unless he is to undermine his own effectiveness, cannot pretend that the drive toward violence does not exist in this society nor that it is not a part of the American tradition.[8] Americans from the American Revolution on have been willing to fight and die for those things they held dear. Moreover, many students in the inner city live in violent surroundings, where violence is not only present but an accepted procedure for achieving ends. The use of violence must be discussed in terms of the other alternatives that are available and put in the context of other values: What might be lost through violence? This is not a plea to condone violence. It is, however, a plea to teachers to recognize that violence is a historically viable alternative in American society, and it is better to help students deal with this alternative openly and rationally than to ignore or condemn it and only give the student further evidence that the school is out of contact with reality.

In dealing with societal issues, such as the justification of violence, it is critical that the teacher move from the abstract level of society to the students' own world. For most public issues--violence versus due process, the individual versus authority, etc.--are mirrored

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[8]For a discussion of textbook treatments of violence, see James P. Shaver, "Diversity, Violence, and Religion: Textbooks in a Pluralistic Society," School Review, 1967, 75, pp. 311-327.

in the students' own lives--in their relationships to one another, to the school authorities, to the police, to their parents. Cases and illustrations drawn from these situations can do much to help the student comprehend and engage himself in the broader public questions.

I have attempted to delineate and explore some considerations underlying a proposal that the social studies curriculum be public issues oriented, as well as point out some implications if that orientation is to be adopted. If the school is to be a viable element in society's attempts to confront and handle its problems, school personnel--in particular, social studies teachers--must face up to the problem of the school's lack of contact with the realities of the individual students' lives. This is particularly true if social studies education is to have the impact on the rational consideration and solution of societal issues for which the emphasis on citizenship education would seem to call. The inner city school--set as it is in an environment racked with economic problems and social dissension, with a clientele which often feels powerless to comprehend and deal with the social forces impining on it, and for whom the typical social studies curriculum does not even have the relevance of being sufferable because it is the prerequisite to college--seems a particularly appropriate place for focusing a curriculum on public issues and attempting to provide a realistic context for teaching students to deal rationally with those issues.