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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines some of the values that make the High School Geography Project (HSGP) useful in other cultural settings, describes some of the current developments in other countries, and illustrates the utility of the project by following one activity through four "transformations." Most countries fall into one of three categories of trends in geographic education: (1) those updating the content of traditional courses, (2) concerned with the reform of teaching methods within traditional frameworks, and (3) concerned with improved methods and new course structure for mass education. The six distinctive teaching approaches used in HSGP--openers, concept developers, skill development, simulations, inquiry techniques, valuing processes--have their maximum utility in the third category of countries. Simulations produced in West Germany, Israel, Brazil, and Hong Kong acknowledge the Portsville Game from HSGP as the source of their ideas. The obvious utility in other countries of the HSGP teaching approaches suggests that a future direction for geographic education lies in a concrete "place" component. (Author/JH)

The role of the High School Geography Project in geographic education reform worldwide.

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Throughout the world the reform of geographic education is now in full tide both in the updating of the content and methods of existing courses and the development of new, more broadly-based courses like general studies, integrated studies, or education for living. These broadly-based courses are a response to growing demands for mass education. They make provisions for wide ranges of student interests and abilities - provisions which are commonplace in North America but are rare almost everywhere else. The dominance of university curricula over all aspects of secondary school subjects is still the norm in most parts of the world, and the emergence of these new courses represents major triumphs for progressive education.

During the past two years I have been able to visit some twelve countries in five continents and observe the changes taking place in geographic education. For the most part geography still exists as an autonomous secondary school subject but, as indicated above, it is gradually merging with other subjects and other viewpoints to serve the purposes of mass education. Either way, in traditional geography courses or in social studies courses, I have found the High School Geography Project (HSGP) to be in high demand. Earlier publications from several countries made it clear to me that this was likely to be the case. [1]

In this paper I propose to outline some of the values that make the HSGP useful in other cultural settings, describe some of the current developments in other countries, and illustrate the utility of the HSGP by following one activity through four "transformations". In conclusion I would like to suggest some future directions for geographic education based on the trends I have observed. There is no implication in this paper that the HSGP was a causal factor in the various developments around the world. As so often happens in scientific work, parallel developments come to fruition at the same time in more than one setting.

HSGP Legacy. The terminal products of any major curriculum project have limited utility. They are geared to specific needs in one or two countries at a point in time and this space-time constraint is generally recognized. Revision of the HSGP materials is already underway, less than five years after initial publication. If, however, we look behind the terminal products, to ideas and processes, we can identify more lasting content for a wider setting. The teaching approaches employed are both an accurate and a comprehensive picture of the ideas and processes of a project.

I find six distinctive teaching approaches in the HSGP. These are not always separable in practice but the major characteristics of each one

are readily identifiable. These approaches, which are briefly summarized here, are usable in all kinds of geography and social studies courses. They, more than any other aspect of the HSGP have been welcomed in other countries.[2]

(1) Openers. These take serious account of the world of the learner at the beginning of a sequence of lessons, finding out what is known, developing interest, or disturbing mind-set. "Site diagrams" at the beginning of the Urban Unit, or "Trend towards uniformity" discrepant data at the end of the Culture Unit are examples of this approach.

(2) Concept developers. Concepts are sets of attributes that identify a class of phenomena. They are initially formed by experiential data. The critical aspects of this approach lie in the diagnosis of a student's experiential background followed by the presentation of "bite-size" visual and verbal data which build on the experiential base. The series of color photos at the beginning of the Habitat and Resources Unit are designed to develop the concept of "habitat".

(3) Skill development. Skills of all kinds are normally developed in project materials. In the HSGP the emphasis was on cognitive skills, and activities were designed to extend a student's ability to interpret documentary sources, to draw inferences from data, and to predict results from given information.

(4) Simulations. These approaches have received wide acclaim in recent years because of their ability to stimulate interest, to secure student involvement, to make provision for peer learning, and to pose problems for subsequent inquiry. Simulations like "Game of Farming", "Portsville", "Rutile", "School Districts for Millersburg", "Metfab", and "Flood Hazards" were among the most successful of all the HSGP's activities.

(5) Inquiry techniques. Inquiry-style teaching is very old. Socrates and Jesus taught in this way. The reflective thinking approach of John Dewey was a type of inquiry. During the 1960's a variety of forms of inquiry appeared in curriculum materials and the HSGP, like other science-based projects, gave most attention to the university model of inquiry - "hypothesis-forming", "testing", "validating" - in order to reflect at the school level the research scholar's mode of working. The "sequent occupance" study of U.S. settlement in the Urban Unit and "Watchung" in the Habitat and Resources Unit are good examples of this kind of inquiry.

(6) Valuing processes. Valuing processes are closer to the core of social studies education than any of the other teaching

approaches. It is here that the bases of decision-making at all levels of personal and community life are explored and analyzed. Three stages of valuing are normally pursued - identification, defence in the face of new data, and action. The "Waste Management" activity at the end of the Habitat and Resources Unit invariably brings out a wide range of values.

National trends in geographic education. Countries fall into one of three categories from this point of view - those of a very conservative nature in which the updating of the content of traditional courses is the primary concern, those countries that are mainly concerned with the reform of teaching methods within traditional frameworks, and those countries where the concerns of mass education are uppermost and where, consequently, there is concern both for improved methods and for new course structures. There are some countries which do not fit this classification - countries like Indonesia and India - where interest in geographic education is high, but where the more fundamental concerns of teacher supply and provisions of buildings and books preclude active work in the reform of particular subjects.

South Africa is typical of several countries whose school systems are dominated by university curricula, where the main function of school at each level is seen as preparation for the next higher level. Geographic education reform consists of bringing the content of school geography closer to the content and method of the corresponding university courses. [3] Central and Eastern Europe, France, Japan, and many of the developing world countries fit South Africa's pattern. The HSGP has had limited utility here because its content does not adequately sample the current professional field.

West Germany is a good example of a group of countries in which there is strong interest in reform of method in autonomous geography courses. A Committee of the prestigious Association of German Geographers has received a financial grant from the Federal Government to develop innovative classroom materials, and a published version of an urban unit has already appeared. [4] It is based on the "Portsville" activity of the HSGP and it is described in more detail in the next section of this paper. Israel and Finland are countries that are engaged in similar activities to those of West Germany. As already indicated, the HSGP has been of substantial value here because of its teaching approaches.

The most active countries are those in which the stress is on mass education, where geographic education reform is seen in "pure" geography courses and in new broadly-based courses. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England, Scotland, Brazil, Singapore are all involved in developments of this kind. [5] The HSGP has had maximum utility here because its teaching approaches could be used in both types of development. Australia ran more school trials on the HSGP than any other country outside Canada and the United States, and the results of these school trials confirm the basic position taken in this paper, viz. that the HSGP's greatest contribution to curriculum development in other countries is its teaching approaches. The results of these Australian school trials

are as yet, unfortunately, only available in rough manuscripts and taped interviews.

Four "transformations" of Portsville. Portsville is a simulation activity from the Urban Unit. It employs a board map with a surface and stick-on pieces similar to those of the commercial lego toy. Students are asked to reconstruct Portsville (a thinly disguised version of Seattle, Washington) from historical documents using different colors of lego pieces to represent different land uses. Since the historical documentation does not give information on the precise locations of land uses a great deal of judgment and opinion is injected into the activity. In the ensuing discussions students learn a great deal about the factors affecting land uses at different times.

(2 illustrations - students working with Portsville kit at a Boulder high school)

In the West German Project a similar urban land use simulation has been developed. In this case students are given a full documentation on the history and future plans for Coburg, a small town in South Germany. They are then presented with a hypothetical problem involving alternative land uses for the downtown area. Each type of land use carries its own advantages and disadvantages. Students have to make a decision, then defend their decision before their peers.

In Israel a national geographic project includes a hypothetical town, representative of Israeli urban conditions, drawn on a large board and accompanied by counters of different colors which represent different land uses. Students are given a limited number of counters from each land use category, and asked to place these counters in appropriate positions on the board with due regard to certain defined constraints. When all the pieces are in place, students make a copy of their "map", remove all the pieces, and start the exercise a second time but with a larger number of counters in each category. The larger number of pieces reflects the growth of the city from its initial size. The "map" at the end of this second session is again recorded, and the exercise repeated a third time, with a still larger set of counters - so large in fact that they cannot all be fitted on the board, and the students have to devise various types of high rise constructions.

In Brazil a board very similar to that of Portsville accompanies the Urban Unit of the National Curriculum Project in Geography and Social Studies. Like Portsville a local toy kit was adopted and modified, and students then asked to use the kit to reconstruct the evolution of a town using only historical documents.

(2 illustrations - Brazilian teachers in training in the use of the urban board simulation)

Hong Kong authorities have developed a role-play simulation based on a current controversial issue, that of the future land use of the Kowloon railway yards when the railway station is closed down next year. The land is located in a prime location for any one of commercial, industrial, or park uses. Students are provided with supporting documentation for these three potential land uses, and are asked to decide which use is best for each part of the railway yards.

(4 illustrations - 2 maps and 2 photographs from the Hong Kong simulation)

All four of these simulations acknowledge Portsville as the source of their ideas, and all four have recognized that the pedagogic values observed in the U.S. original - high interest, peer learning, knowledge of factors affecting land use, student involvement, willingness to continue study outside of school hours - have also been experienced in their different settings.

Summary. This brief outline of world development in geographic education is highly selective. It emphasizes only those endeavors at the national scale in which the HSGP plays a significant role. This role is most significant in countries that are primarily concerned with mass education.

In the United States the HSGP materials are mainly used in social studies courses, and their success in such a setting is well known. This fact, coupled with the obvious utility of the HSGP teaching approaches in social studies courses in other countries, suggests that a future direction for geographic education lies in a component role - the concrete "place" component - of social studies courses. As such, geographic education will make a powerful contribution to mass education, one that goes far beyond the present contributions of autonomous geography courses.

1 See correspondence, articles, and bibliography in High School Geography Project : Legacy for the Seventies, (Ed) Angus M. Gunn, Centre Éducatif et Culturel, Montréal, 1972. This book is now out of print but a limited number of copies are available from the present writer.

2 See Experiences in Inquiry, HSGP and SRSS, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1974, and Teacher Resource Book for the Man on the Earth series of books, Angus M. Gunn, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1974, for fuller descriptions of these approaches.

3 See Transvaal Education Department Syllabus for Geography, 1972.

4 See Multi-Medien-Paket, Stadtsanierung, Ernst Klett Verlag, Stuttgart, 1973.

5 See, for example, the 1973 publications of the National Curriculum Centre for Social Science, Canberra, Australia.