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ABSTRACT

Because the study of history efficiently enculturates the young and contributes to the security and continuity of the society, it has almost always been accorded a place in the syllabus. Its inclusion in the American school syllabus has been variously modified by the considerations of several schools of educational philosophy and by the reports of a number of committees and task groups with utilitarian approaches to history dominant. The perceived inadequacy of many traditional techniques of teaching history has led to an emphasis on involving students in the use of historical method, which is best done by combining team teaching, individualized instruction, and the open classroom in a format which "postholes" history by utilizing a number of minicourses. (Author)

SECONDARY SCHOOL

HISTORY: OBJECTIVES & PROGRAMS

Response to NASDTEC Standards, 3.4 Standard II

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Man has been variously defined, according to differing perceptions of his uniquesness, as the rational animal, the featherless biped, the animal with the opposable thumb. He might well be defined as the record-keeping animal, for the intelligence of other species stops short of the ability to cumulate experience through recording it so that the young need not learn solely through direct experience. "We are," observed John of Salisbury, "like pygmies standing on the shoulders of giants."[1]

In the most primitive social groups, the first imperative is that one must learn the arts of survival, the methods of providing food, shelter and security. The second imperative is that one must learn to be a good citizen of the tribe, for the group's existence is so tenuous that it cannot tolerate those who do not contribute to its functioning. One learns these things largely by learning the history of the tribe, which conveys both its essential aims and processes. Through the long history of western man, no social group, no matter how sophisticated, has been able to ignore the importance of historical understanding for the cohesion and survival of the social group.

The three peoples from whom western civilization has derived its dominant motifs, the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans, all placed great emphasis on the indoctrination of the young in a well-articulated mythopoeic tradition. When, in attempting to train up the perfect citizen for 4th century Athens, Isocrates made place in his curriculum for the study of history so as to prompt his students to emulate the noble deeds of their forbears, he was simply formalizing and extending this practice. The measure of his perceptiveness may be the achievement of his pupil, Thucydides.

From the time of Isocrates until the last century, history in the curriculum was generally exemplary, presenting pupils with heroic models to imitate. The Middle Ages and the Reformation sought their exemplars in Christian antiquity, while the Renaissance preferred to look to the classical ages. Accuracy was not prized, especially when it diminished the impact of the moral lesson. History was at the service of religious belief and personal virtue.

The efflorescence of scientific history coincided with the emergence of nation states. The welding together of such states from disparate human elements was greatly simplified when those human elements could be convinced that they shared

a common and glorious historical past. In the schoolroom, history was made to serve the purposes of nationalism. Scientific at last in its heuristic and analytic aspects, history was still subject to distortion for political and pedagogic effect.

With the coming of the contemporary era, therefore, the major educational systems of the West were committed to the inclusion of history in the secondary school syllabus, and this for the same basic reason which impels primitive tribesmen to recollect the past for their young, because the study of history efficiently enculturates the young and contributes to the security and continuity of the society.

When the great educational systems were being built in western nations, the dominant educational philosophy was Idealism. To the Idealist, the sensible world is an evolving modality of Absolute Spirit manifest in space and time. Man must participate in this evolution, a process by which the universe, already basically spiritual, becomes increasingly spiritualized until the fulness of perfection is reached. This philosophy of history determined the pedagogical use of history. In the first place, Idealists embraced the exemplary function of history, agreeing with Isocrates that moral virtue is fostered by the contemplation of noble deeds. In the second place, Idealists looked to history

for evidence of progress in spiritual evolution. Both of these tendencies melded nicely with the demands nationalism made upon history.

By the middle of the last century, Realism began displacing Idealism as the dominant philosophy of education. Realists agree that the objects of the sensible world are real and ordered to each other by extramental relations. The dominant group, Scientific Realists, hold that the goal of learning is to uncover and understand these relations, which constitute inexorable laws governing the universe. In this way, man gradually can extend his domain over reality. To them, history is a science. This science is less precise than biology or physics, but elaborations of methodological techniques such as quantification renders it increasingly useful for concept formation, pattern analysis, and extrapolation of future social trends. It must be presented in secondary education as the core discipline of the social sciences, care being taken to emphasize the elucidation of historical processes and to avoid the pitfalls of hero worship. Another group of Realists, the Rational Humanists, visualize education as a process by which we introduce the young into the milennia-long dialogue which constitutes western civilization. To them, the past is important because it provides us with all

the tools, assumptions, techniques and agenda for further investigation. There can be no proportion to our lives, they feel, without appreciation of history's lessons, without the ability to cull insights from parallel historical generalizations. Every attempt to build true intellectual power must begin with the imposing foundation laid by three thousand years of wisdom.

While the Idealists and Realists prefer to view the universe as a well-ordered and stable phoenomenon, Experimentalists prefer to avoid metaphysics. Enough for them a phoenomenology of the universe which indicates that all things change constantly, thus presenting man with a potential infinity of problems to be solved. To solve those problems, man must distinguish between the familiar and the novel, i.e. between those things which change less rapidly and those which change more rapidly, and utilize the former to aid in coping with the latter. Experimentalists have found no value in studying the past for its own sake.[2] History must be studied to illuminate today's problems and concerns, with especial reference to fostering the sort of social insight which makes for truly enlightened citizenship. Because Experimentalists believe that there should be no fixed and final goals in advance of the educational process and

that the educational venture should proceed by means of the solution of whatever problems the learner chooses, historical knowledge has often been achieved in their schools less by engaging in course work in history than by the need to utilize historical data in solving problems.

Most recently, the Existentialists have made an impact upon educational thought. Existentialists generally emphasize the uniqueness of the individual. Those who have attracted the greatest audience are those who assert that man is a free being who finds himself leading a fortuitous, contingent and superfluous existence in an absurd universe. He is condemned to create his own essence in the face of this absurdity by constant exercise of his free choice. Other people will objectify and dehumanize him, reduce him to a component of mass man. This he must avoid. The process of education is the process by which he learns to choose freely, responsible only to himself. Exemplary history is meaningless to him; what others have done is irrelevant. History cannot expose him to the laws which govern the universe; that implies meaning, and for him the universe is absurd. History as a vehicle of good citizenship is a snare for him; to be a good citizen is to cease to be authentic. For him, history has meaning only to the extent that it can be perceived and studied as an art form, as one of the humanities.[3]

All of these, with the exception of Existentialism, have had, at one time or another, a potent effect upon American public education. In the last eighty years, their influence on secondary schooling has most often been directed by the reports of various task groups. These gradually constructed a rationale and framework for history in the public secondary school curriculum.

At the outset, the National Education Association's Committee of Ten recommended a sequence embracing American history and government in Grade 7, Classical Greek and Roman history in Grade 8, French history in Grade 9, English history in Grade 10, American history in Grade 11, and intensive study of a particular period in Grade 12.[4] This ambitious program was undercut when the NEA's Committee on College Entrance Requirements settled on a minimum of one unit (four hours per week for one year) of history for a secondary student intent upon entering college.[5] In the same year, the Committee of Seven of the American Historical Association recommended a four-year program in Grades 9-12, consisting of ancient history, medieval history, modern European history, and American history and government.[6] Twenty years later, another committee of the NEA stipulated that the study of history was vital to the achievement of citizenship, one of the seven goals of secondary education.[7] When, in the late Thirties, the NEA sought to expand

on the goals of secondary education, it adduced ten functions of secondary education, each having broad application across several subject matter areas. The third of these actually constituted a rationale for the study of history: "To reveal higher activities of an increasingly differentiated type in the major fields of the racial heritage of experience and culture, their significant values for social living, the problems in them of contemporary life, the privileges and duties of each person as an individual and so as a member of social groups . . ."[8] At the same time, the Educational Policies Commission, composed of members of the NEA and the American Association of School Administrators, elaborated the objective of civic responsibility to include social justice, social understanding, critical judgment, tolerance, world citizenship, law observance, political citizenship, and devotion to democracy.[9] The task of the social sciences in general and history in particular was increasingly being specified in ever clearer and more numerous objectives.

In 1944, a committee of the faculty of Harvard University issued a pivotal report on the goals of American public education. Its recommendations in the area of history were elaborate. The committee felt that no one should graduate from secondary school without "a considerable amount of work in the history of modern civilization."[10] In addition to a course in European history, with appropriate geography, a course in American history as

part of a sequence in social studies was mandated "to provide a basis for all later study or discussion of American life and society and for participation in the work of citizenship."[11] The committee took pains to suggest that this course not be a matter of rote memorization of dates, but should utilize rigorous investigation to assess the legacy of past generations. Moreover, it insisted that

> the student should gain from the study of history a considerable training in what may be called the historical skills: the ability to analyze maps and documents, to apply tests of credibility, and even scholarly validity, to current materials as well as to those of the past. 12

The report achieved widespread circulation. Appreciated primarily as a spirited defense of the traditional claims of history, it was of great significance in its championing of the use of real historical method in the secondary classroom. In the same year, the Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges noted that "every organized social group is guided by its recollection of the past . . . because knowledge of the past is the guide to acting in the present and planning for the future."[13]

The insistence of the Harvard Committee on historical investigation of other societies in addition to America has become more widespread in the years since the Second World War. The 1955 White House Conference on Education insisted on "programs designed to acquaint students with countries other than their

own in an effort to help them understand the problems America faces in international relations."[14] Most recently, the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education insisted upon introduction into the high school curriculum of global education, at least part of which must be historical in orientation.[15]

Whatever purposes western philosophy and practice have assigned to the study of history, it is evident that Americans have focused on the utilitarian view of history advanced by the Realists and Experimentalists.

It is evident that the purposes of the nation-state, patriotism and citizenship, are still central objectives of the study of history. "The study of the nation's past," wrote Mark Krug recently, "is considered by many, and with good reason, one of the best means of re-enforcing national unity and of instilling love of country and patriotic devotion."[16] Of course, a people so recently tormented by the ethics of the Vietnam intervention may be pardoned for demanding a more careful and critical formulation of the patriotic purposes of history, such as that advanced by Donald W. Oliver in contending that "history as well as the newer social sciences should be used as vehicles by which the student can learn what is right and what is wrong (particularly the former) about himself, his community, and his national society."[17]

Another major objective of the study of history is its contribution to the study of society and the solution of its problems. Some prefer to view this function in an almost apocalyptic context, feeling that "without a knowledge of history it is doubtful that we can solve the racial tensions which are literally tearing this nation asunder or solve the international problems which at any moment could erupt and destroy us all."[18]

These two major objectives may be, and have been, distinguished into a number of more specific objectives, as in the Cleveland, Ohio Public Schools' Senior American Heritage Unit:

1. To develop a better understanding and appreciation for our way of life.

2. To consider the possibility of our future heritage in the light of our past.

3. To be more aware of the multiple factors and forces which help de termine our society.

4. To develop a personal credo regarding our country and heritage, the goal being the personal realization of the meaning of America.

5. To better comprehend that in a democracy each individual must contribute toward maintaining and strengthening our future.

6. To realize that Americans today, and increasingly so in the future, will have to consider international affairs as a significant aspect in the development of our heritage.

7. To understand that our heritage has been based on the belief in people and their intrinsic worth.

8. To develop a sense of pride in our system and heritage without creating animosity toward other nationalities. [19]

The preparation of such objectives has not, however, solved certain persistent problems in the teaching of secondary history. Instilling patriotism too often means favoring bias over objectivity. In 1966, for example, British and American historians studied the treatment of the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and World War I in British and American schoolbooks, concluding that nationalistic bias is still pervasive, albeit more subtle than formerly.[20] Moreover, an Educational Testing Service study indicated that the secondary history and social studies curriculum followed in American public schools in 1965-66 did not differ significantly from that of twenty-five years previous and that 85% of students reported that more than half of their reading in the American history course came from a single text.[21] This most often has meant a strict chronological approach combined with a dreary presentation of material. The treatment is solely narrative and descriptive in too many instances. Thus,

> when students set about learning "history", they are trying to learn facts outside the context of problems. Thus the facts of history fail to achieve the status of data. For many students the facts remain lifeless and courses in history seem pointless. 22

Books of readings from historians' works do not ameliorate this situation when the student simply ends up memorizing interpretations rather than facts.[23] Finally, the knowledge explosion has led many teachers to cover history on more superficial levels, utilizing constantly broader generalizations,[24] a circumstance which has led some to reject generalization as a strategy in the teaching of history.[25]

These things being so, some have concluded that new objectives are needed in the teaching of history. "Students sould not only study the products of history as found in their schoolbooks and other sources; they should also solve historical problems using the methods of the historian."[26] This notion has been formulated into several specific objectives by Byron Massialas:

1. History instruction should encourage and enable the participant to arrive at a body of tested principles or generalizations conc erning the operations of human societies.

2. History teachers should deal cognitively with method s of inquiry by which historic al knowledge is discovered, verified, and reconstructed, and through which the individual may pursue knowledge on his own.

3. Instruction in history should create the conditions which would maximize the opportunity of the student to engage in creative thinking and in intelligent conjecturing.

> 4. The history classroom, conceived as a microcosm of of the community and the prevailing social order, should furnish the forum for assessing alternative schemes in dealing with normative (value) questions; pressing individual and social concerns should be discussed in an intellectually and ethically responsible way. 27

Teaching history with these objectives in view does not mean abandoning the traditional objectives, but achieving them in a different manner, by eschewing the narrative, textbook dominated approach in favor of involving students in historical investigation utilizing scientific method: selection of a problem, defining and clarifying it, formation of alternative hypotheses and testing them. It does not even require maintainence of the traditional chronologic al sequence, for treating a limited number of episodes or periods in greater depth through inquiry may be more productive of a historical sense than "covering the material".[28] The point is to accustom students to using sources, evaluating their significance, verifying their accuracy, and drawing inferences, and this may be done in a variety of ways.

An effective strategy for undertaking these combines team teaching in an open classroom with individualized instruction in a group comprised of 100 students and five teachers. The curriculum is actually a series of mini-courses, each one

treating of a concept significant in American or other history. Each concept is subdivided into six or eight specific areas. One of the mini-courses, for example, might be Economic in American History, with such subdivisions as The Impact of Inventions on Economic Change in the Early Nineteenth Century, and The Rise of Big Business in the Post-Bellum Era. In order to complete the mini-course, each student would have to elect and complete a set number of the subdivisions. Completion of a subdivision would involve each student in a series of activities, e.g. reading, lecturettes, discussions, role-playing, library research, etc. In order that these not be simply cosmetic changes, each mini-course must be planned on the basis of carefully chosen behavioral objectives. Moreover, the teacher must take care not to set the students tasks that amount to no more than "busywork". Rather, students must be challenged by questions and problems to which the answer is not easily available or forthcoming in a clearcut manner. When this is done, it becomes evident that

1. Historical materials can provide appropriate settings for intuitive and imaginative thinking;

2. The student can capitalize on certain cues and springboards and begin to offer plausible explanations;

3. Students do invent systems of categorization and intellectual attack which continually change as new conditions and new factors are brought to bear on the case . . . ;

4. Students are capable of finding certain principles underlying historical writings . . .;

5. The idea of confronting students with limited cues and challenging them with penetrating questions has merit on motivational bases. 29

Finally, it ought to be noted that there is much opportunity for interdisciplinary activity and techniques in the study of history, and these ought not to be construed solely in terms of the social sciences. The past can be illumined by the study of its literature, drama, art and music at the same time that the appreciation of these is deepened and extended by the historical purview.

NOTES

[1]The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium. Trans. by Daniel D. McGarry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), III, 4.

[2]Cf. John Dewey, Democracy and Education (N.Y.: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1961), pp. 213ff.

[3]For fuller elaboration, see Thomas F. Powell (ed.), Humanities and the Social Studies (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1969).

[4]NEA, Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies (Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1894), pp. 163-164.

[5]NEA, Committee on College Entrance Requirements, Report of the Committee on College Entrance Requirements (Chicago: University of Chcago Press, 1899).

[6]American Historical Association, The Study of History in Schools (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1899), pp. 34-35.

[7]NEA, Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education, Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Bulletin 35 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918).

[8]NEA, Department of Secondary School Principals, The Functions of Secondary Education (Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1937).

[9]Educational Policies Commission, The Purposes of Education in American Democracy (Washington, D.C.: EPC, 1938), p. 108.

[10]Harvard Committee, General Education in a Free Society (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 138.

[11]Ibid., p. 141.

[12]Ibid., p. 142.

[13]Edgar B. Wesley, American History in Schools and Colleges (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1944), p. 16.

[14]Committee for the White House Conference on Education, A Report to the President (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956), p. 8.

[15]National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education, The Reform of Secondary Education: A Report to the Public and the Profession (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. 62ff.

[16]Mark M. Krug, History and the Social Sciences: New Approaches to the Teaching of Social Studies (Waltham: Blaisdell, 1967), p. 22.

[17]Donald W. Oliver and James P. Shaver, Teaching Public Issues in the High School (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. 4.

[18]Arthur Pearl, The Atrocity of Education (St. Louis: New Critics Press, 1972), p. 227.

[19]12B Problem: Social and Economic (Cleveland: Board of Education, 1965), p. 19.

[20]Ray Allen Billington, "History is a Dangerous Subject," Saturday Review (Jan. 15, 1966), 59.

[21]Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education (N.Y.: Random House, 1970), p. 173.

[22]M.P. Hunt and L.E. Metcalf, Teaching High School Social Studies (N.Y.: Harper, 1955), p. 353.

[23]Allen W. Brownsword, "What's with the Teaching of History," California Social Review, VI, 1 (Dec. 1966), 10-19.

[24]Arthur S. Bolster, Jr., "History, Historians and the Secondary School Curriculum," Harvard Educational Review, XXXII (1962), 48-49.

[25]Cf. Edwin Fenton, The New Social Studies (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 12; Idem, "A Structure of History," in Concepts and Structure in the New Social Science Curricula, edited by Irving Morrissett (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), p. 52.

[26] James A. Banks, Teaching Strategies for the Social Studies: Inquiry, Valuing and Decision-Making (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1973), p. 177.

[27] Byron G. Massialas, "Teaching History as a Inquiry," in New Perspectives in World History, Thirty-Fourth Yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies, edited by Shirley H. Engle (Washington, D.C.: NCSS, 1964), p. 625.

[28] Silberman, p. 330.

[29] Massialas, p. 649.